

COCOROSIE ELECTRELANE AUTHOR MATT SHARPE KIM COLETTA

punk planet

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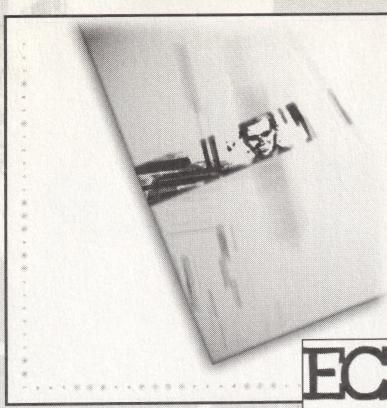
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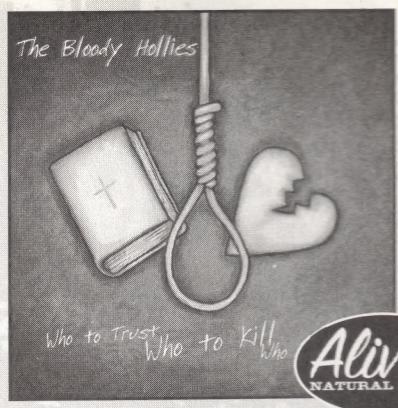
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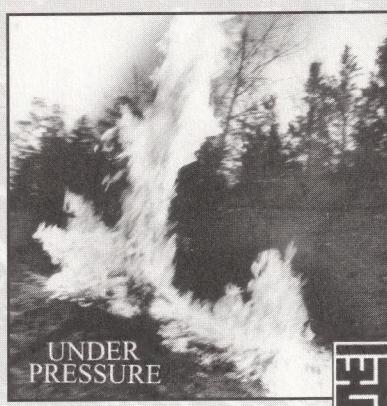
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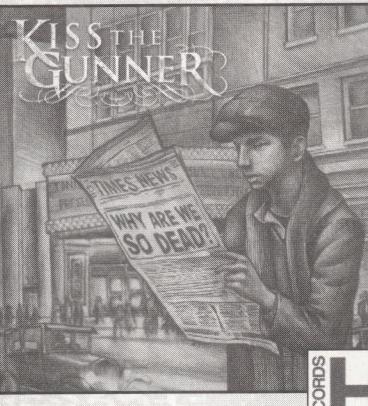
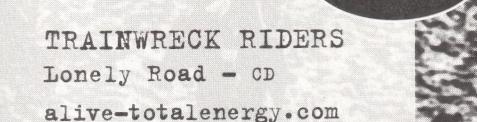
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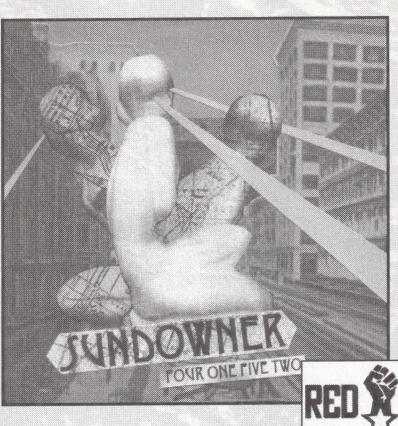
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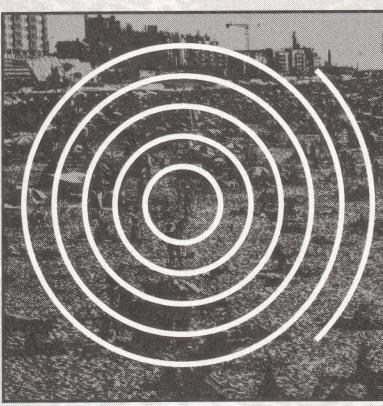
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PPA

79

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the risks

intro79

T

hirteen years is a long time. Think back to who you were 13 years ago: you may have been a child, playing with dolls and horses; maybe you were in high school, bored and waiting to get out; perhaps you were in a van, logging miles with your band, old friends you haven't spoken with in a decade. Whatever it was, you're a wholly different person today—13 years is, after all, a long time.

This issue marks 13 years of *Punk Planet* magazine. We started *Punk Planet* as a 56 page all-newsprint bimonthly; I think I have ink from those first few issues permanently rubbed into my fingertips. We began because those of us involved in those early issues felt like a new perspective was needed in the underground: one that was inclusive of the many different shades of punk while remaining committed to independent production and thought. The first few issues offered the promise of a quality read, though definitely lacked the reality of one. We were learning and, thankfully, you stuck with us and, with your help, the magazine grew up.

It should go without saying that the magazine is pretty much a different en-

tity entirely than it was when it started—13 years is, after all, a long time—but at its core this magazine still offers new perspectives and a commitment to independence that few other magazines attempt anymore. Even as the pages have gotten prettier, the writing more engaging, that core has never left the magazine. The same way that you still hold a part of your past self close to your heart, the philosophical core of *Punk Planet* has held true over 13 years.

This issue continues to dedicate its pages to fresh voices and new ideas—from the rebirth of Students for a Democratic Society and a look at how a reinvigorated student activism will reshape the landscape of political resistance, to the personal stories of people like author Matt Sharpe, whose unexpected bestselling novel changed his life, or ex-Jawbox bassist Kim Coletta's reflections on parenthood. This issue is filled with vital stories, engrossing tales, and a commitment to giving you the new, now.

Thanks for 13 great years,

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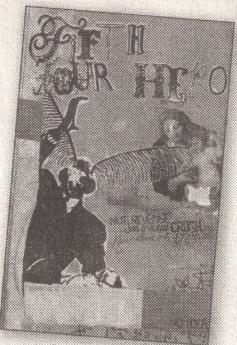
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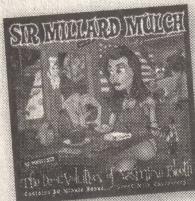


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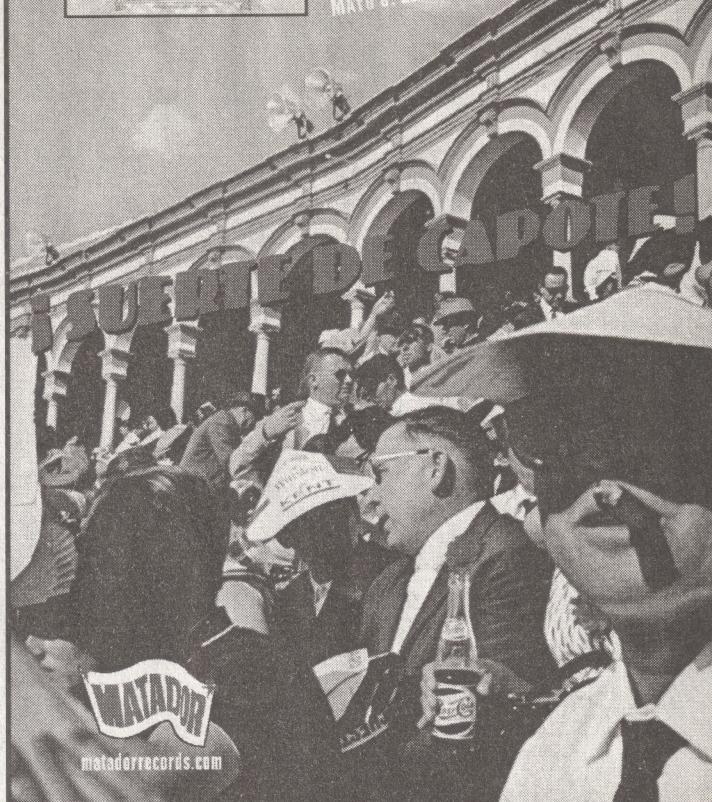
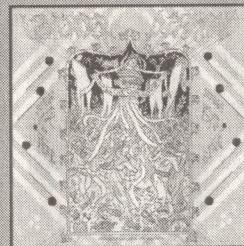
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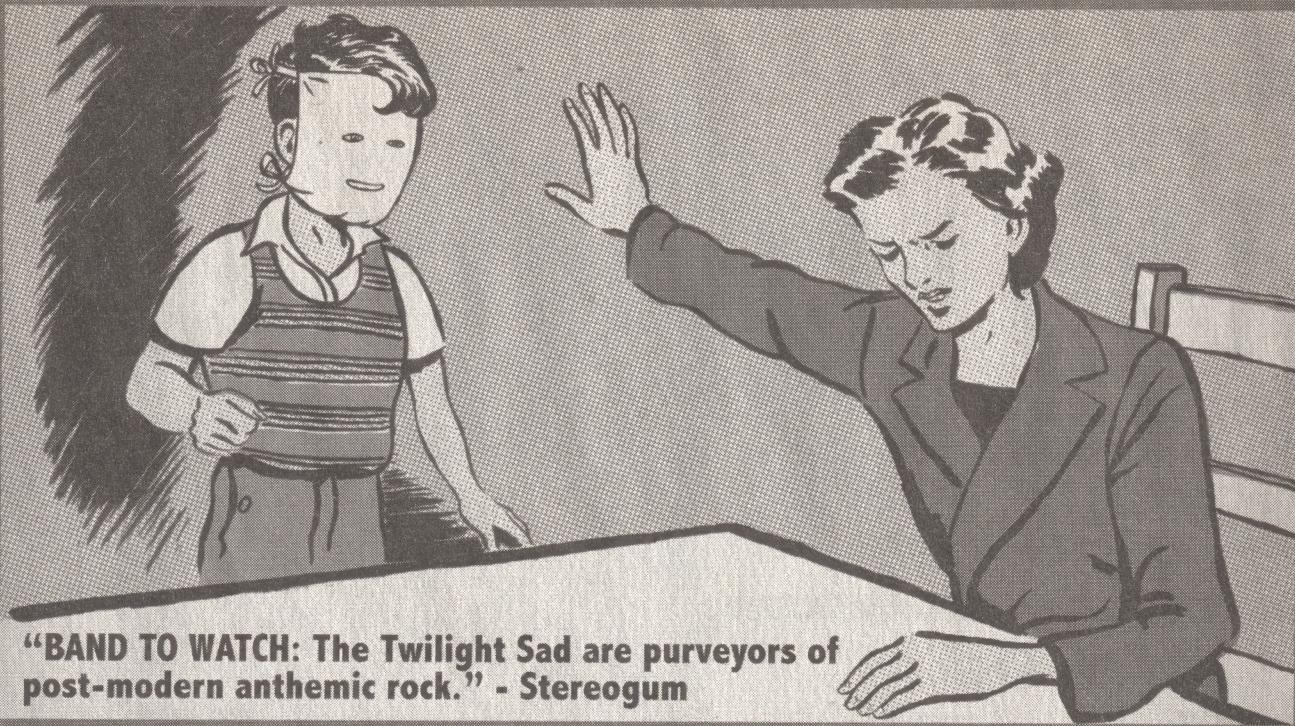
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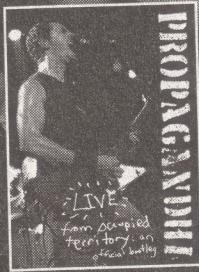
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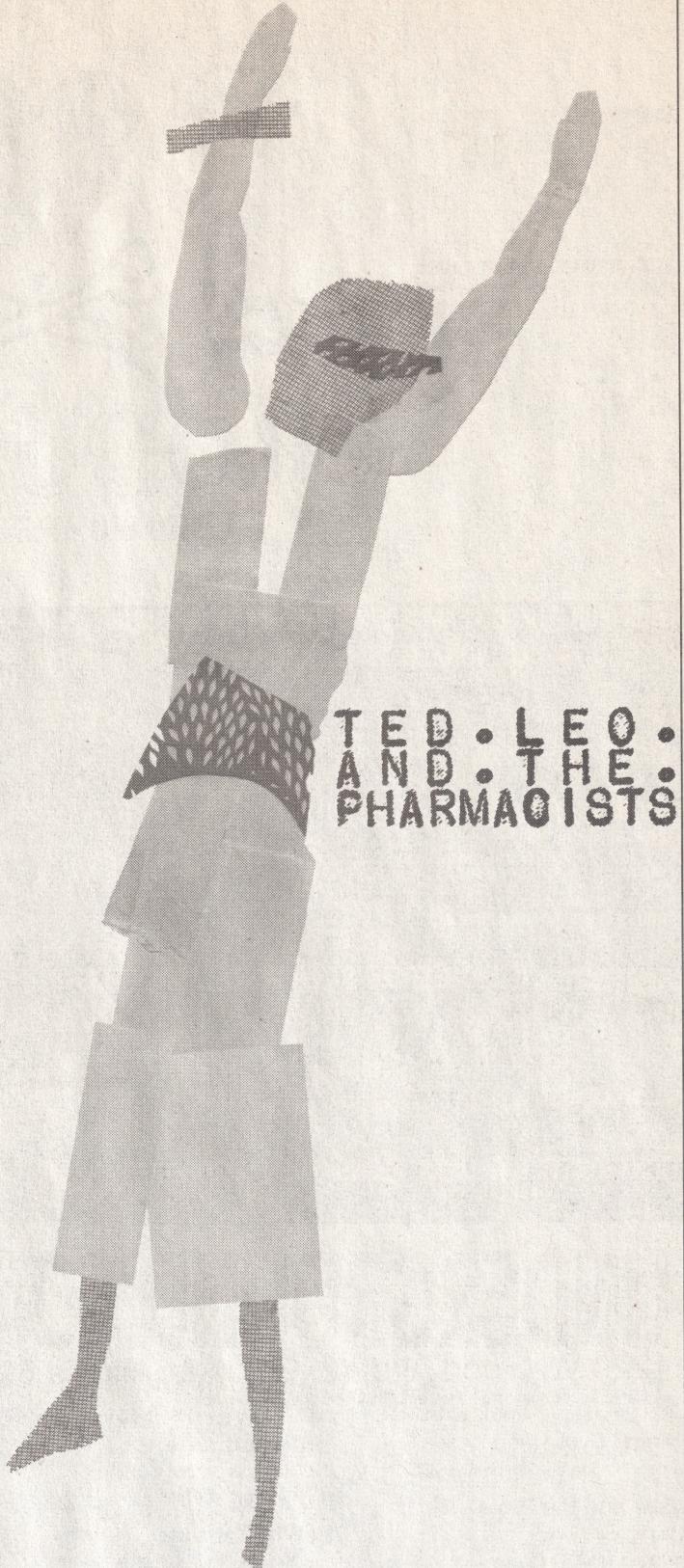
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For fans of: Against Me! Fake Problems

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For fans of: Champion, Inside-Out, No Warning

**O PIONEERS!!! SAW WHEEL SPLIT CD**

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The release is Houston's own O Pioneers!!! and Austin's very own Saw Wheel, both bands hailing from the great state of Texas. O Pioneers!!! deliver a hard hitting mix of Gainesville sounding punk rock and fun. Saw Wheel delivers a folk sound not like any other, but very personal.

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Shot Baker (A)

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static

SCANNING THE DIAL FOR LIFE ON THE MARGINS

"It used to be independent businesses. Almost everything that was there when we started is gone."

THE LAST INDEPENDENT RECORD STORE IN DOWNTOWN TEMPE, ARIZONA FIGHTS TO STAY ALIVE

It's not quite a scowl that has transformed Michael Pawlicki's face. "I'm really pretty dispirited right now," he says. "Slow days are torturous, and today was a slow day."

Pawlicki is the manager of Eastside Records in Tempe, Arizona. Eastside is one of the few surviving independent businesses of downtown Tempe, a southeastern Phoenix urban center that has undergone radical changes over the last 15 years. Located next to Arizona State University, Mill Avenue used to be a thriving cultural area with a variety of bars, restaurants, bicycle shops, thrift stores, bookshops, and record stores. It was home to an early 1990s music scene that gave bands like the Gin Blossoms and Dead Hot Workshop their start.

Now, Mill Avenue has been reworked into a clean, carefully landscaped public avenue, lined with chains and frequented by starstruck college kids who don't know the difference. The city center has been meticulously planned, even down to the perpetual presence of buskers and homeless crustpunk types, left alone by the police because of the aura of "authenticity" they give the street.

"It's a boondoggle," says Pawlicki. "It used to be all independent businesses, and almost everything that was there when we started is gone."

Lately, since their recent downsize from a double lease, Eastside has barely been able to pay rent. "Places like this are closing left and right," Pawlicki says grimly. "We're not sure if we'll be around

much longer. There's not much of a climate for us here."

Ask most of the older residents of Tempe and they'll tell you straight: the climate stinks. Mill Avenue has an uncanny likeness to a mall, and getting drunk in the money pit of its main street bars is a Quixotic solution, at best. But what else is there to do in Tempe?

Many would say the answer is to leave Tempe and head for Phoenix. Downtown Phoenix is the home to a burgeoning arts and music scene that's been fostered by the dedication and passion of local citizens who are fed up with the lack of cultural life in Arizona. Prominent among these is Kimber Lanning, owner of Stinkweeds Records, and co-founder of the Modified Arts gallery and music venue. For her, community is the alpha and omega.

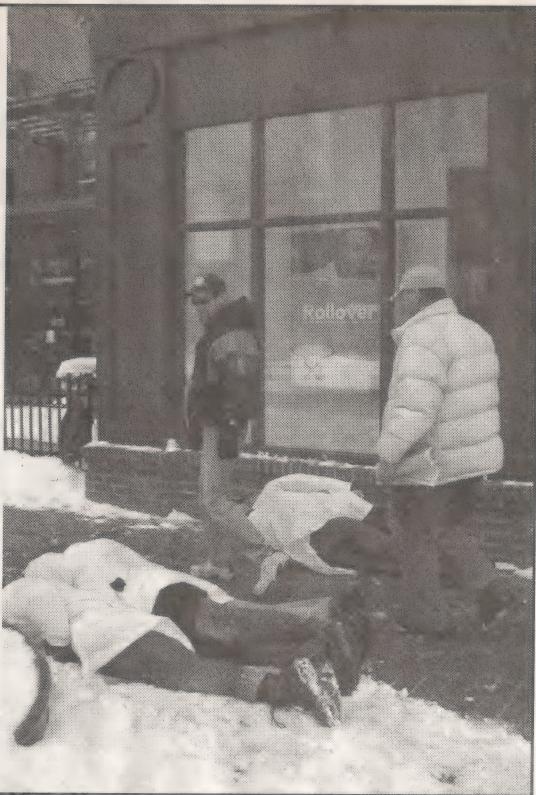
"At Stinkweeds, the experience in the store revolves around community," she says proudly. "You could take any number of the characters in here and transpose them into a bookstore, or even a giant

Latino kitchen. They're all these afflicted people who love each other and are willing to do anything for each other. I've seen a lot of great kids grow up in my store with that.

"Those kinds of relationships are hard to find now; there was a time when they were top priority in this country. At the Modified Arts, I meet all these punk-rock kids who claim to understand community values, but then they spray-paint the inside of my gallery and piss on my floor. I don't sit down and moan about it—but I do ask how they could possibly grow up with no conception of community! There's just this sense of hopelessness. There's nothing behind you."

But hopelessness is only one part of the larger problem: that the economic efficiency of corporation planning has literally bulldozed America's community centers.

To this end, Lanning works as executive director of Arizona Chain Reaction, a pro-independent-business nonprofit. Its motto is "Think Inde-



"Are you marketing something, or are you protesting something?"

THE INSTITUTE FOR INFINITELY SMALL THINGS AND THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE

During February 2005, a small group of around 15 people took some time to roll around on the sidewalk in front of a cellular phone dealership in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When asked why they were performing such a seemingly illogical act, they pointed at a sign in the window of the store, which—in its attempt to convince consumers that its phone plans offered the most useable minutes—simply stated "Rollover." The response from observers was one of bemused puzzlement. "Are you marketing something, or are you protesting something?" one individual quizzically asked those gyrating on the ground. The answer given to this woman by one of the rollers—"Neither"—did little to alleviate her confusion.

The action in front of the retailer was just one piece of a larger series of performances by the Cambridge-based Institute for Infinitely Small Things, a self-described research organization that, according to its mission statement, seeks "to invent and distribute new practices of political engagement in everyday life." This particular campaign—titled "Corporate Commands"—seeks to

pendently, Buy Locally."

As Lanning explains, the patronage of independent businesses keeps more money in the local economy and generates greater tax revenues; chains take it out of state. "Blighted empty shopping centers" are created when a corporate location—a Wal-Mart, a Pizza Hut, anything—packs up and leaves town. And of course, independent businesses and historic buildings offer community and character that can't be had through corporate development.

"Kimber goes to a lot of zoning meetings, and does a lot with community planning," Pawlicki says of his friend. "I can't do what she does, butting heads with big money. If I went to one of those meetings, I'd just get so pissed. I'd be like . . .

what the fuck! I wouldn't be able to control myself. I just can't understand their mentality."

In any case, the characteristic community at these record stores shines through. As Michael and I talk, Jane Bainter, the namesake of Jane's Addiction, drops in and says hello.

Eventually, our talk turns to music; the turntable at Eastside has parsed everything from Alternative TV to "America Eats Her Young" by Funkadelic. Michael Pawlicki says he listens to all kinds of music, like anyone else. "But I honestly haven't been paying that much attention recently. My mind has been on other things. I've been doing so much at work that I almost don't even notice the music." —Matthew Neff

Visit Eastside Records in Tempe at 217 W. University Drive or online: www.eastsiderecordsaz.com.

"I feel the last record was so over-analyzed, and maybe we lost something in the process."

WITH THE RELEASE OF THEIR NEW ALBUM, PIEBALD PICKS UP THE PIECES AFTER A SHATTERING RECESSION TO THEIR PREVIOUS RELEASE

When Piebald released *All Ears, All Eyes, All the Time* in 2004, it was with a great deal of artistic pride. After all, they'd worked hard making the record they wanted to make, but it turns out people hated it. Why? The answer's simple: it didn't sound like Piebald. Such a reaction has killed many a band, and certainly made Piebald think about their future. Their latest album, *Accidental Gentlemen*, is a bold return to form, with a sound that hearkens

back to their early, post-hardcore years. Instead of spending weeks on arrangements, the band decided to spend very little time on polishing their songs, opting for a quick, catch-it-as-live-as-possible ethic, resulting in a fresher, rougher, and tougher-sounding Piebald. Lead singer Travis Shettel is a man who loves his band and loves making music, in spite of the struggles and hassles that go along with being in a band and making music.

help shoppers in the Boston Metropolitan Area to, according to Institute member Pirun, "start noticing the language of such advertisements, and begin a critical recognition of their landscape." Using, as Pirun explains, "performance as a research methodology," such actions are intended to show people that "they're not just selling you a product, but rather an active lifestyle" of unnecessary consumption. So far, the Institute has also targeted Nike ("Just Do It"), RJ Reynolds Tobacco ("Let Freedom Roar"), and Nissan ("Remember: Inhale, Exhale, Inhale, Exhale"), among countless others. By physically acting out the "commands" of corporate capitalism, Institute members show just how absurd such advertisements—and our slavish attention to them—truly are.

Making such performances even more effective is the fact that they are done playfully and non-violently. No paint is splattered, no windows are smashed, and no shop owners are abused. The Institute, according to Pirun, strives to be "not shocking or confrontational, but to be in some way very hard to dismiss. They're just not sure what to do with us." Institute members seem to put a great value on this state of ambiguity, along with the conditions that make such a condition possible. The ambiguous nature of their performances essentially forces observers to think through these issues for themselves—rather than relying solely upon what a placard or chanted slogan may tell them to believe. At the same time, the non-confrontational tactics that the Institute practices may provide these onlookers with an atmosphere of security, al-

lowing them safe space to question their surroundings. It's a novel approach to protest politics, one that Pirun stresses is important to the Institute. "Every time we are asked to leave [a store front]," he explains, "we leave."

All of this is not to suggest that the Institute is reinventing the wheel when it comes to public performance/protest. Pirun and his associates draw from such historical movements as the Situationists, the Yuppies, and the artists commonly associated with Dada. The Institute's thoughts on the importance of the "everyday" also bear a striking debt to the work of French theorist Michel de Certeau. Yet attention must be paid to how the Institute succeeds in drawing attention to the ways that the urban environment—in the early 21st century—is being demarcated and utilized. This is clear in the "Corporate Commands" campaign, but also on display in the Institute's other efforts, including their initiative to allow Cambridge residents to rename their city's streets, parks, neighborhoods, and squares (Harvard University, for example, has been renamed "Cash Money Land"). Such actions appear trivial, but allow individuals the opportunity to interact with their environments in ways that may lead to even greater engagement with the issues that the Institute wishes to stress. "You can do these small things that will add up to something bigger," concludes Pirun, with an optimism that seems neither forced, nor unwarranted. —Michael Carriere

For more on the efforts of the Institute for Infinitely Small Things, visit www.ikatun.com/institute/infinitelysmallthings.

Accidental Gentlemen doesn't sound like either one of your previous two albums; in fact, it doesn't sound like the same band at all. Why? Were you trying to reconnect with your earlier style, or was it a reaction against the negative response to your last album?

I think a little bit of it was a reaction to how the last record went. People would actually come up to us and say, [indignantly] "Why does your new record suck?" I've never tried to intentionally appeal to anybody, but fuck, after experiencing numerous incidents like that, I think it definitely had a little something to do with it. I think that—well, tell me, would you call the record more angry and dark?

It's more immediate and sharper

edged. It's very cutting, stabbing.

We were trying to write punch-in-the-face songs while not trying to lose the melody. There's more urgency, a little bit more negative energy, even. *All Ears, All Eyes, All The Time* sounds like we smoked a lot of pot and listened to a lot of old records. This one sounds like we got mad at the world and wanted to make a record saying so.

I loved *All Ears, All Eyes, All the Time* because it was lush.

We worked really hard on those songs. We analyzed and over-analyzed those songs. We spent a lot of time on the arrangements and thinking about the flow and the songs and what it should look like, and when we put it out . . . no one cared. [Angrily:] We put all this effort

and time into it, we busted our ass, and people just didn't even care about it. [Sighs.]

Did it almost break up the band?

No, but it did make us say, "Hey, why don't we do some other stuff for a while and we'll come back to Piebald when it feels exciting again?" We did an American tour after the record came out, and it was *bad*. We did a European tour and it was even *worse*. It was simply terrible. I thought, "This is really terrible, Piebald just isn't fun at all, but I don't want to have it stop being my life." I feel the last record was *so* over-analyzed, and maybe we lost something in the process. Some people *love* that record. I think it's great. Other people *still* come up to me and say, "That last record

sucked," though. I don't care if you like it or not. I don't go into people's houses and say I hate their paintings.

Was this the first time you really understood the expectations as to what fans think Piebald should sound like?

Yeah. You want people to like what you're doing, and you want them to like every record and you want them to like your live show, but if they don't, you can't do anything about it. So you just have to keep on doing what you're doing and move on. You just have to understand and accept that some people really like it, even though not everybody does.

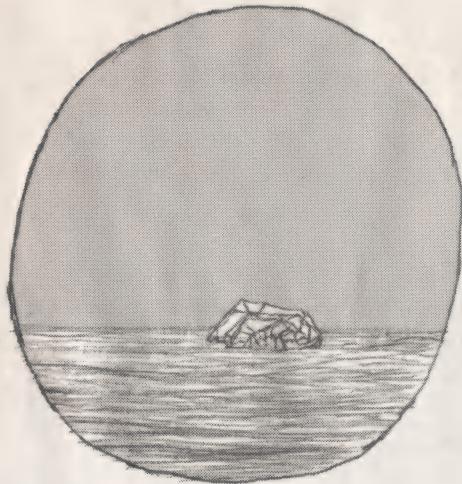
After a decade, how does a band keep going?

It can be *very* trying. We just

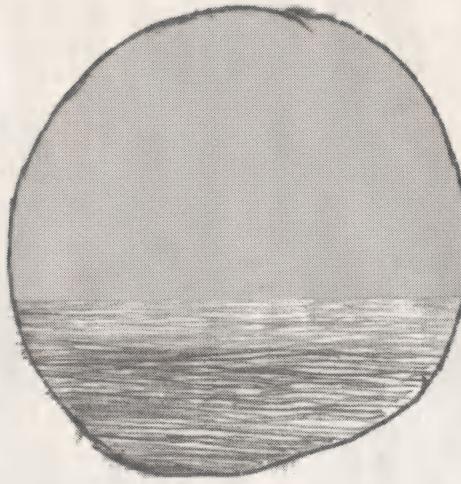
Iceberg Town

BY JOE MENO AND NICK BUTCHER

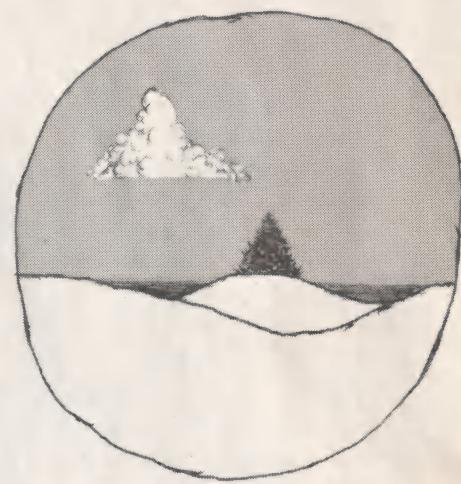
After the sad results of the most recent election, many of us fled north. But the great continent could not bear the immense strain; a unnoticeable yet glacier-sized city drifted off into the ocean and the small strange world of *Icebergtown* was born then.



what do you do when the world has become an empty sea of upturned ice?



when the only thing not made of ice has suddenly gone?



Elise had vanished; without word, without reason.

left behind our van. Last night it broke down and we couldn't get it started. We had to leave our van in Rochester; we had two dudes in the back of a Penske truck with *everything* that was in the van, just to get to tonight's show and to finish the rest of the tour. On more than one occasion I've woken up at three or four in the morning, just to push the van down the road. It's been very trying. To be in a band for more than 10 years, it's not easy. It's mentally taxing. Don't get me wrong—I love it! I don't think I do anything better than I do this. I don't think I'm going to ever stop, but being in a band for nearly 12 years with almost all the same guys? It does get trying, but it's extremely rewarding.

To make it to the show today, we can celebrate the fact that we made it to the show. When we arrived, we all shouted, "Wow, we actually made it!"

We get to play a show tonight! Cool!" [Laughs.] It's all about celebrating the day-to-day victories. —*Joseph Kyle*

Accidental Gentleman is out on SideOneDummy Records.

"As soon as the war ended [most reporters] just packed up and left. But there was so much more to report on."

RADICAL JOURNALIST ANA NOGUEIRA TAKES HER REPORTING ON THE ROAD WITH SAMIDOUN, A MULTIMEDIA TOUR ABOUT THE LEBANON/ISRAELI WAR

Ana Nogueira is in Chicago, animatedly explaining the complicated politics of Lebanon as the audience strains to hear her over the El. After a rapid-fire breakdown of the convoluted facts, Nogueira breathlessly

concludes with the phrase, "I could go on: I'm totally obsessed with Lebanon."

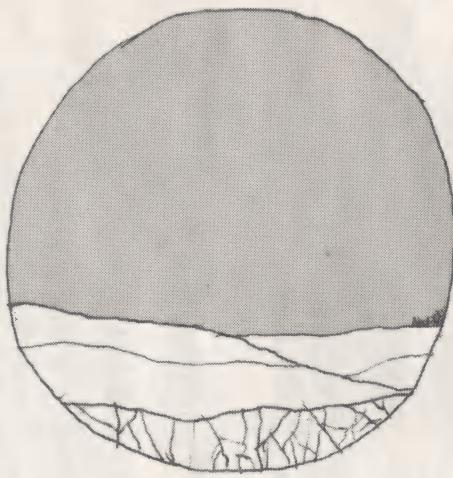
Nogueira was passing through town in December with photographer Andrew Stern; together they were screening their multimedia

presentation entitled *Samidoun*. The two had recently returned from reporting on the 34-day war in Lebanon and were now on an impromptu tour of the Midwest. *Samidoun* consists of Nogueira's straightforward documentary film and Stern's emotive slideshow of photographs matched to Arabic music. Their combined efforts create a piece that is moving, informative, and helps bring those in the US closer to the battles simmering and raging in the Middle East, if only for a few hours.

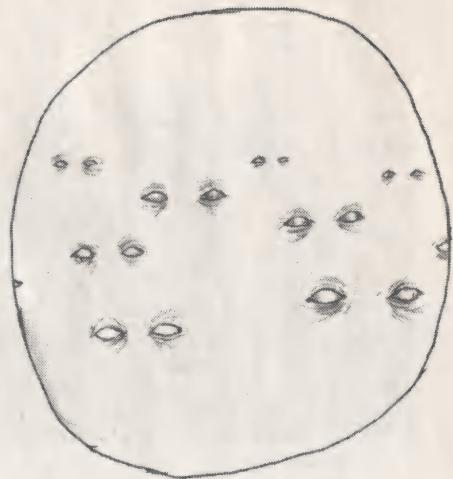
Nogueira grew up in South Africa until the age of 11 and then moved to New York. After college, Nogueira helped to get the worldwide network of Independent Media Centers off the ground (there are now six in Africa); and was instrumental in forming the New York IMC and



Staring at the jagged cliffs of hoarfrost below, a single red glove blew in the wintry wind.



Grasping it against my chest, I saw a thin red thread trailing along the edge of the island: following the thread, winding it around my hand, I hurried deep into and looking,



It was there that I found the trees staring back at me; only the trees were not trees but a copse of terribly-frozen people.

its newspaper *The Independent*. Nogueira went on to sharpen her journalistic skills at *Democracy Now!* as a producer. Recently she left the job, which allowed her to travel to Lebanon.

Why go to Lebanon, rather than continue reporting from New York?

During my four years at *Democracy Now!* I produced many shows about the Middle East from a little studio in downtown Manhattan. I had never been to the Middle East, so my work at times felt academic. So much of it was about war, but I had never experienced full-fledged war myself. There are many issues around the world that need similar independent, on-the-ground coverage. But war, being the most immediately deadly and destructive, is

one of my priorities.

How would you describe *Samidoun*, the presentation you're touring the country with?

Andy's piece has sounds from funerals and beautiful songs in Arabic that talk about memory. It's very personal, about people who are affected by this war. For example, he met a survivor of the Qana bombing, which became a huge symbol of the war. Israel bombed a house of mainly women and children hiding in the basement, and they mostly all died from suffocation. He met one of the sole survivors, a 14-year-old girl, he went to live with her in Qana after the war for about a week. A lot of his presentation focuses on her and what's left of her family and how they

cope with the shock of losing 27 people in one night. The bulk of my piece is about the aftermath and the rebuilding. A major part of my documentary is about a little reported story: factories that were hit [by bombs] and the motives behind that; the economic damage the country as a whole sustained from the bombing of power plants and water treatment systems. I went to factories in the Baka Valley mostly owned by Christian Maronites. They were subsidiaries of French companies that have contracts with the UN. Yet, Israel bombed them to nothing, saying that Hezbollah was hiding ammunitions there, which was absolutely outrageous. Many of the industries like steel and

prefab housing were becoming major regional players. Everyone I spoke to, including the head of the Chamber of Commerce, thinks that targeting these particular industries out of competition was a primary motive for Israel.

In the film, a member of Hezbollah says, "We don't want U.S. aid, why don't you take care of people in New Orleans first." Did witnessing the clean-up effort bring forth any truths about Katrina for you?

Hezbollah's response immediately after the war was unbelievable. They were handing out 12,000 dollars to anybody who had lost their home, which was critical—these people had nothing. All you had to do was show one piece of paper that proved



"An abandoned house serves nothing and no one."

SQUATS IN BARCELONA HOUSE MUSIC, ART, AND SPACE FOR RESISTANCE

Una casa abandonada no sirve a nada ni a nadie," proclaims a banner hung from a squat in Barcelona: "An abandoned house serves nothing and no one." Over the past decade, over 300 squats and social centers have emerged from Barcelona's abandoned real estate. Info-Usurpa, a weekly calendar, runs two to three tabloid-sized pages listing of squat events, including bike repair, feminist pornography workshops, punk shows, and political discussions.

Ruina Amalia is one of over 40 squatted social centers. Located in the immigrant neighborhood El Raval, the two-year-old center houses a carpentry workshop, a computer center, Biblioteca Kilombo (a radical lending library), a flamenco workshop, and an Oficina d'Okupacion (office of squatting) in which new squatters can learn the essentials of opening a building and those facing legal problems can seek advice. In addition, Ruina Amalia allows other groups to utilize the space. A collective that supports prisoners in Barcelona meets in the courtyard every other Wednesday. On the other Wednesdays, it holds a *kafeta pro-presos* or a cafe to raise awareness (and money) for prisoners.

Food is a common motivation for squat gatherings. Every day, several social centers host *kafetas*—events in which *tapas* (small

where you lived. It was more important that people had what they needed than go through some long bureaucratic process, which is what happened in New Orleans. I mean, Hezbollah is a part of the government but it's not the government. I'd talk to crews with bulldozers clearing rubble and I asked them who's hired them and they said "We're not hired. We just contacted Hezbollah and said we will clear the rubble from this bridge if we can take the steel and recycle it." It was a barter exchange that was going on with many different companies and groups. There was also a volunteer group like Common Ground [in New Orleans] called Samidoun, which is what our piece is named after. Samidoun also means steadfast in Arabic. They were part

of a coalition of activists who during the war were providing a lot of the relief and security for displaced people in Beirut and elsewhere. The government was not there doing that; it was volunteers from the community and it was Hezbollah.

Were there specific things about the war that you felt were under-reported?

We arrived only ten days before the war ended. We made it to the south on August 14th, right as the cease-fire started, and went to the hotel resort where a lot of the media was staying. They had been holed up there the whole time, because Israel would bomb anything that moved in the streets. As soon as the war ended they just packed up and

left. But there was so much more to report on. Foremost, tens of thousands of people were returning to rubble, how were they going to live? How was the reconstructing effort going to proceed? Who was going to fund it? What was the government going to do? What was Hezbollah doing? But even more pressing were the unexploded cluster bombs. There were 1.2 million cluster bombs dropped on southern Lebanon, mostly within the last 3 days of the war. Dozens of people were killed by these cluster bombs, many of them children. A child would rummage through what was left of their home and pick up this little shiny ball and boom they're killed or maimed.

How are Lebanon and the Middle East important to you, in the context of coming from South Africa?

I was too young to be a part of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. As I have grown older, I see racism as a prevalent factor in almost every social issue, not the least of which is the war on terror and how the West perceives Arabs. Israel, the United States, and their respective media, too often place the life of an Israeli or an American at a much higher value than the life of an Iraqi, an Afghan, a Palestinian, or a Lebanese person. They are people who have the same aspirations of living in peace and prosperity as anyone. — Lisa Sousa

View some of Nogueira's work at <http://democracynow.org/static/ananogueira.shtml>

dishes) are served for free or for a few euros. Some *kafetas* are explicitly to disseminate political information, like the biweekly *kafeta pro-presos* at Ruina Amalia. A *kafeta* at La Karni focused on the eviction of the Ungdomshuset squat in Copenhagen. Food was served, videos were screened, and information was shared about a demonstration outside the Danish embassy the next morning. At Can Masdeu, a former leper hospital and now amountain squat outside Barcelona, the weekly *dinar popular* focuses on community building, allowing people a space to eat, talk, and play flamenco together.

Life is not always placid. In early January, two squatted social centers, La Mambo and Kan Mireia were evicted. Squatting is technically illegal in Spain, and the landlord is required to take squatters to court. If the squatters lose, police are supposed to provide warning before evicting. Although both squats had lost in court, neither had received advanced notice. Squatters protested La Mambo's eviction that same afternoon, and again four days later. Clowns, including one dressed as the Grim Reaper, played protest songs on suzephones, accordions, and drums. Others handed out fliers about La Mambo's eviction to bewildered passersby and tourists. Once the march started, women wearing masks and capes emblazoned with the letter M spraypainted slogans and stencils on the sidewalks and buildings. Uniformed police, less than 100 feet away, watched indifferently. The march wound through the narrow cobblestone streets of the Barri Gotic, the city's center, ending at La Mambo where several demonstrators hung a banner from the roof. Five uniformed police watched from the end of the block, seemingly bored by their task.

Not all demonstrations are as tranquil. The next evening,

squatters protesting the eviction of Kan Mireia attempted to block an urban highway. Police responded with rubber bullets and beatings.

That same night, Kan Kadena, a former olive oil mill, held a party in solidarity with the 4F prisoners—a group of partygoers who had been violently beaten, arrested, and imprisoned. In a stone building that was once an animal enclosure, a DJ played techno while projections of colors and light flashed onto screens overhead. Some people danced, some yelled to each other over the music, some slept against the walls. By the entrance a bar sold juice, beer, and mixed drinks. Outside, others gathered around a bonfire. These parties go on not only all night, but often until the next evening.

In addition, Kan Kadena also hosts punk shows and theater performances. When the Kan Kadena house had first been squatted nine years ago, the neighborhood had been full of old stone buildings. Over time, they had been replaced by prefab brick buildings, car dealerships, and a new police precinct less than 1000 feet (or one city block) away. The city had proposed building a road that would cut through Kan Kadena. Thus far, nothing has come of the proposal and the residents, partygoers, punks and performers of Kan Kadena can continue their activities unmolested.

Despite the threats and evictions, the spirit of resistance prevails: After squatters in one house rejected the landlord's bribe to peacefully move out, he threatened to forcibly evict them the following morning. Word spread throughout the neighborhood's squatting community. The next morning, 20 squatters gathered outside the house. Upon seeing the crowd, the landlord left and has not bothered the occupants since. —Victoria Law

"So many bands have gotten so mathematical in their music."

LADYFINGER(NE) IS STRIPPING IT DOWN, SPITTING IT OUT, AND PROVING THAT OMAHA CAN STILL BRING THE ROCK

The press release accompanying Ladyfinger(ne)'s debut album *Heavy Hands* (Saddle Creek Records) notes the band sounds like Motorhead. This is a label that, through the efforts of Team Oberst and others, has helped usher in the Sensitive Male Revolution that has, of late, overtaken the independent music scene. Could such a label break from my obviously stereotypical conception of them and put out a solid piece of rock-and-roll? Though I remain unclear where the Moto-

head comparison comes from, the answer to this question is a resounding "yes."

The Omaha-based band has released an album that draws from the best of the many great Midwestern bands that have come before them. It is loud, lacks unnecessary pretension, and displays a keen attention to the craft of songwriting. In an era when bands feel the need to attach layer upon layer of bells and whistles to their songs, Ladyfinger(ne) stands out by not trying to do too

much: with nary a keyboard in sight, the 12-piece orchestra has thankfully been allowed to stay home. What is present is a sound that internalizes some of the more powerful trends in independent rock from throughout the past 15 years. In an era when too many bands look to the 1980s for their primary source of inspiration, this sets the band apart from their contemporaries.

Punk Planet recently sat down with Ladyfinger(ne) members Ethan Jones (bass), Pat Oakes (drums), Chris Macmuller (vocals, guitar), and Jamie Massey (guitar) to discuss life on Saddle Creek, life in the Midwest, the dangers of the flesh, and remembering the '90s.

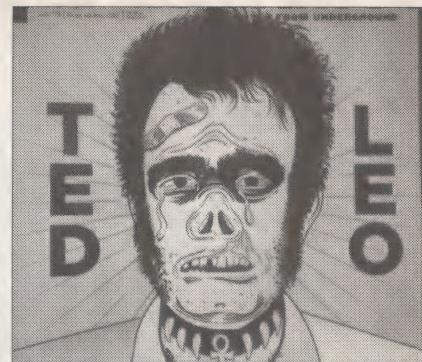
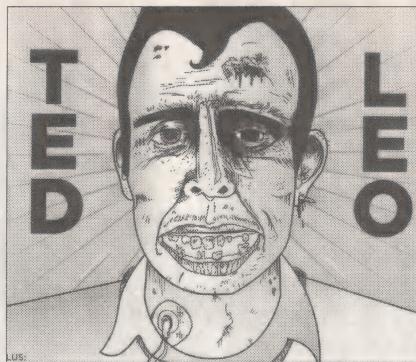
Heavy Hands definitely doesn't sound like a typical Saddle Creek

release. In fact, the record, with its heavy reliance on influences from the 1990s, doesn't really sound like much coming out in this day and age. What were you drawing from when you were recording this album?

Chris: We didn't enter into the group thinking, "OK, here's what we're going to do." We know what we like to play, and we wanted to do a more hard rock sort of thing. We had all been in bands that were a little more out there, a little more mathematical, a little more schizophrenic. A little more abrasive, perhaps.

Pat: I think the four of us are probably of the age where we've all had a lot of '90s rock kind of like ingrained in us, growing up back in junior high

GALLERY: Ded Leo



Poor Ted Leo: On February 25, *Punk Planet* held a Release Party/Showcase for our latest issue and kicked off the night with a comic art battle hosted by Ezra Clayton Daniels. The Ded Leo series was created by the Hairy Nipples Comics collective in Chicago. From left to right: Lucy Knisely, Kaitlin Kostus, and Grant Reynolds. Other participants included: Lilli Carre, Jeremi Onsmith, Jeremy Tinder.

and high school and even after that. So I think that probably comes through whether we intended it to or not. We definitely grew up listening to bands like Seaweed and Am Rep bands.

I think there's also more a streamlined aesthetic that you take from that era of independent music as well. Your songs seem stripped of unessential frills.

Pat: That was kind of the intention, to keep it relatively straight forward. Nothing too flashy. It seems like so many bands have gotten so mathematical in their music . . .

Jamie: When we were recording the record, we had Matt Bayles [our producer] come and see us live so he could try to capture that sound on record. We didn't want it to sound too overproduced.

Is there an aesthetic that you think comes out of a band with a Midwestern background?

Ethan: I don't think so. I think it's like what Pat was saying about the '90s rock influence—if it's there it's probably unintentional. It's what we grew up listening to.

Chris: I don't know if there really is any common "Midwestern upbringing," whatever that means or whatever is expected from someone from the Midwest [laughs] . . .

Pat: Well, it seems that the work ethic among bands in Omaha is that they work really hard. A lot of the may come from the fact that Omaha is not exactly the fastest-paced town. For things to do at night you're offered going to the bar or maybe [band] practice or whatever. It just seems like its something we spend more time doing—we have the time to make music.

I ask partly because in your lyrics, the issue of sex is often discussed in contexts of infidelity, guilt, and shame. For example, "One Thousand Tongues," spe-

cifically mentions "the mistress kept in the city," or ". . . Man Woman . . .," in which someone's mouth is referred to as a "vessel of impurity," and ends with the narrator asking "God why do I succumb to this mortal flesh?"

Chris: That's maybe more about certain questions of character. I wouldn't really say that I know exactly someone like that, or that I've ever dealt with something like that on a personal level. Someone exactly like that type of character, do you know what I mean?

So why then write about it?

Chris: Well, it's an interesting little story based on something I may have seen. Something put the idea in my head.

I'd also like to ask you about the song, "Who Believes Enough?" The first line of the song is "These are the dark ages / an empire lies here under the rocks." Is this a commentary on

contemporary American political culture?

Chris: As far as current events go, that song is probably the one most inspired by current events. That's probably the only song we have like that.

A few lines later, you sing, "I know that I am not the one." Is this a statement on the fact that many people have come to expect independent rock bands to express opinions on current events?

Chris: I wasn't coming from any standpoint thinking about the band itself, or our label, or the community in which we are a part of. That was simply observing the media and the behavior of certain political leaders, and saying, "You know, I don't know more than anyone else who we should look to for guidance."

Pat: But it sure the hell isn't you. [Laughs.] —Michael Carriere

Saddle Creek is online at www.saddle-creek.com.

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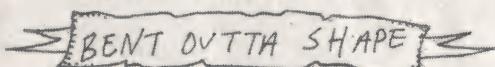
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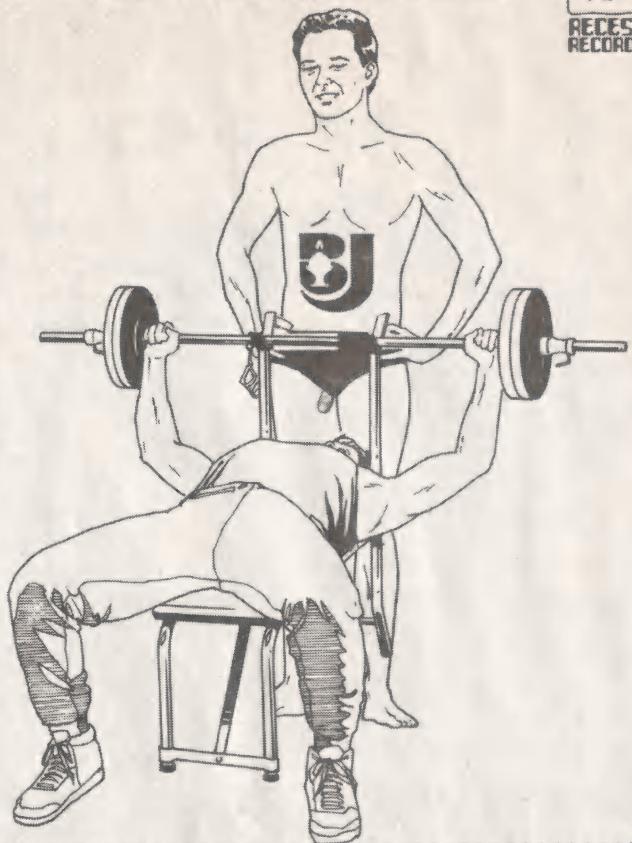
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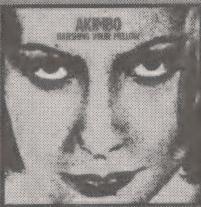
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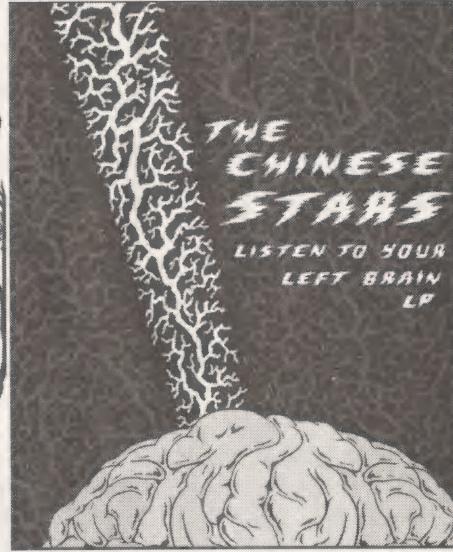
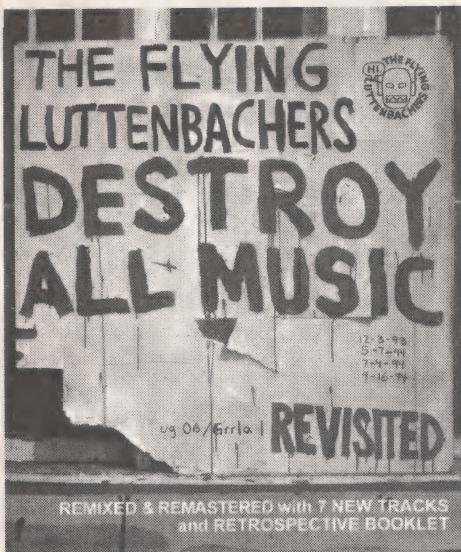
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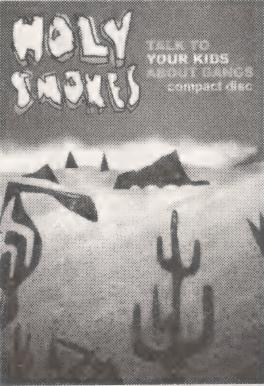
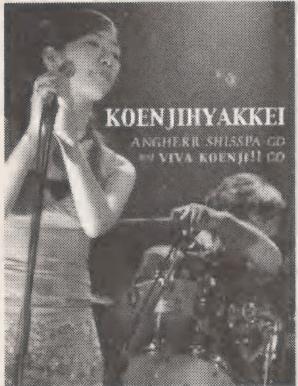
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SOUNDS TO ASTONISH



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Matthew Sharpe, in many ways, is the great white hope of independent publishing: a tremendously successful—and very good—writer with an entrenched sense of integrity equally at home with Katie Couric on the *Today Show* as he is on the phone with *Punk Planet*.

Despite his family background in the independent press (his father runs the research and academic publishing house ME Sharpe) his first two books (*Stories from the Tube* and *Nothing is Terrible*) were published by Villard, a division of Random House. "I really did have this delusion that I think many authors do, that in order to be successful—even in order to be successful in my own self-image—I had to be published by one of these big, widely recognized names." But the books didn't sell very well, so when he started sending around the third—which eventually became the extremely successful Soft Skull Press-published *The Sleeping Father*—"the book was being rejected not on its merits but on the weakness of the sales of the two previous books. So no corporate-owned house would have me."

Life at the indie, he says, is "in so many ways better, more lucrative, more pleasurable, more personally satisfying than I found my experience of working with the multinational conglomerate. Everything is on a more human scale." Yet he's still comfortable enough in the corporate world to allow the latest book, *Jamestown*, a soft-cover deal with Harcourt. It was a deal brokered in the nick of time, too: not only did it allow Sharpe a decent-sized advance, more than most independent houses can pay, but it offered some stability when it became clear that Soft Skull's distributor, PGW, could give all its publishers financial trouble for some time to come.

His previous books have all focused on middle-class family life, but *Jamestown* is a fictionalized account of the first ten years of the settlement, and reenvisions the lives of real historical figures John Smith, Pocahontas, her father Powhatan, John Ratcliffe, John Martin, and John Rolf. But Sharpe, a nearly ridiculously engaging conversationalist with a penchant for knock-knock jokes, adds a psychiatrist/adviser named Sidney Feingold, text-messaging, and a bizarre onslaught of linguistic influences that range from pop songs to urban street lingo. For a story supposedly set 400 years ago, the backdrop the story plays against is far more September 11, 2001 (when a series of coordinated terrorist attacks

in New York and Washington DC killed almost 3000 people) than January 20, 1607 (when a tsunami swept the Bristol Channel and killed almost 2000 people).

Sharpe sat down with me on the phone the night President Bush announced his plan to call for a surge of 21500 more troops to Iraq, an ongoing part of the post-September 11 War on Terror and a fitting backdrop against which to be discussing the bloody, messy foundations on which we first established this country 400 years ago.

Interview by Anne Elizabeth Moore

Photos by Betsy Seder

***The Sleeping Father* was extremely successful, and received overwhelmingly positive reviews and netted you an appearance on the *Today Show*. Do you feel you have a lot to live up to with the new book?**

We here at Matthew Sharpe, Writer and Educator, are giving ourselves a manicure with our teeth as we speak. I'm nervous and excited. *The Today Show* was a lovely, fluke thing. It's shocking what five minutes on television will do for the life of an obscure literary author. I don't know that the new book will sell quite as well as the other, but that part of it is really not under my control. The part that is under my control is already done. I tried something different with this book, and I figured out a way within the very limited thing that I do to express my beliefs about American foreign policy. And so I'm happy . . . I shifted to write about something that happened 400 years ago, and so I had to really rethink how I do everything.

Well . . . it was sort of 400 years ago.

Yeah, I guess one of the first things I had to do was figure out how to write about a place and time that is so remote from us, and me not being an historian and not thinking that I could write the way that people talked or wrote back then and really feeling like, as many books as I read on the subject, I did not feel confident that I had the text of what consciousness was at that time. Or even what any 48-hour period of someone's life would be like. So one of the things I had to do was accommodate my own lack of knowledge and ability. Which is always a big thing that one must do when

writing a novel. You have to make the best of your weaknesses.

What drew you to the story of Jamestown in the first place?

I used to have a job conducting professional development workshops for public school teachers who wanted to use creative writing in their classrooms. And I had a bunch of social studies teachers, middle-school teachers in Queens, New York asking me to develop some writing exercises around Jamestown which they were going to be teaching in their history classes. So I began reading several accounts of John Smith's sojourn and I just became fascinated by the sheer weirdness of the story, the fact that it's actually quite recent, and how different the world was back then. The fact of this being an originary myth, a founding myth of America—one could make the argument that the nation that we have today began there.

This was how long ago?

I began research at the beginning of 2001, and then by the end of 2001, when I was ready to start writing, of course there had been this dreadful terrorist attack on New York City and on Washington, and there had also been the equally if not more dreadful response to the attack by our president. And we began to see shaping up a foreign policy which is now in full flower. As we speak Bush is making the commitment to send 21500 more troops to Iraq. We begin to see this shaping up of this foreign policy that's egregious and, I think, has some of the same philosophical underpinnings as what brought the English to the Chesapeake Area 400 years ago. ¶ The Jamestown colony, unlike the Plymouth colony, was an explicitly money-making venture. There was a bunch of investors who got together some money and got a charter from King James the First to have a plantation as they called it in the New World in which they would figure out a way of exploiting the resources. They thought ideally that, as the Spanish had discovered in South America that there would be gold in the ground in North America. And one of the reasons that they all almost died is that they were spending their time looking for gold instead of, say, planting crops. ¶ But yes, this idea of territorial expansion



MATTHEW SHARPE.

with very little regard for who was living there at the time. I mean, I know that's not Bush's official argument about why we're in Iraq, but I think it's pretty obvious that we are there to, among other things, secure resources so that we can continue in our current fabulous lifestyle here.

At what point in tying all these storylines and images and myths together did you decide, OK, this isn't going to be set 400 years ago. This is going to be set sometime in the future.

I guess I sort of developed the elaborate series of premises while I was writing it and each one seemed to solve a problem. As I was saying before, there was the problem of feeling impossibly remote from this time and place. And then I guess another serious problem for me was being a white, middle-class, Jewish man living in the early 21st century trying to inhabit the voice and mind of an Algonquian teenager who was alive 400 years ago. There felt something presumptuous about it. And I wasn't sure that I felt capable of it. What I would hope a reader to experience is, "Oh yeah, this is about the past but it's also about what's going on right now and it's also about what might possibly go on ten years from now, 50 years from now, 100 years from now. That there is to me quite a recognizable through-line in the imperialist mentality that we operate on in the world."

So how does race operate, then, in *Jamestown*?

It's a lot about race, or at least I hope it is, and I'm glad you're asking me about that. I'd like to think the novel as a whole offers multiple possible answers to the question of what color or ethnicity any given character is. Pocahontas, for example, speaks in many different Englishes: she's a white Valley girl, she's a black girl from the projects in the South Bronx, she's an Elizabethan aristocrat, she's Wallace Stevens, Lou Reed, Otis Redding, Martin Luther King, she's an English major at Wesleyan University, and she's got a secret English-within-English that is and isn't English. That said, many of the characters in the book—both among the "settlers" and the "Indians"—are pretty invested in regarding as alien anyone who isn't from their town. I wanted to write about the seemingly universal human need to create categories called "us"

and "them." The actual world is of course much more complicated than that, but we cling to our false categories and seem to like to die by them. "Us and them" as a deadly ongoing mistake of civilization is one of the things my grim and bestial little historical fantasia is about.

All of these multiple voices emanating from each character and multiple time periods in which the book is set combine into a very unsettled read. Everything becomes a little unhinged at some point or another—including various body parts of one of the recurring characters.

Oh yeah, usually at the point of some sort of weapon. ¶ I hope that a reader could just go, All right, some of these things may not ever be fully explained. Like, What happened to the world, why is it in such a terrible state? And, who exactly are the Indians, are they Indians? Are they not Indians? I guess I wanted to recreate what to me must have been the experience of dislocation and disorientation that both the settlers and the Indians must have felt upon encountering one another. I mean, can you imagine getting off a pretty arduous sea journey of three months, landing on a continent that you are kind of hoping is 50 miles wide, or 100 miles wide, and you're looking for a passage to the Pacific. And you encounter these people—and this would go for either side—who look really weird, of whose language you speak not a word, whose customs you don't understand, whose everything—eating patterns, courtship patterns, communication rituals—nothing. You understand nothing. And you try to understand what the other person's intentions are, and then there are these weird eruptions of violent misunderstanding or just violence that happens, and then you're still thinking, "What just happened? Why do I have a knife in my chest now? I didn't do anything." So I guess I wanted that sense of disorientation of when one culture meets another culture.

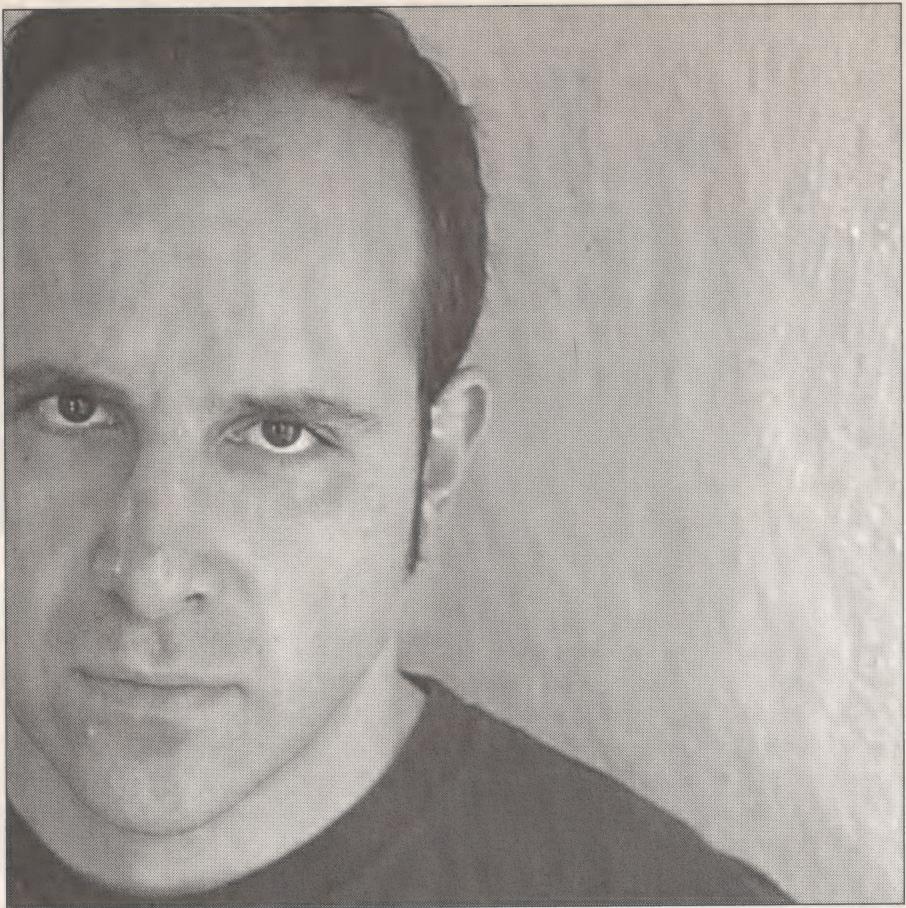
So all this, this theory and these amazingly complex layers of images, and interests and associations and still: the book revolves around this really perky and awesome girl! That's always saying cute things! And that's just not a character most men can take on very well.

Well, she, in the *actual* Jamestown history and myth, the one *not* created by me [laughs]—

There's another one?

Yeah, there's a so-called actual historical one [laughs]—this is the problem with writing history about people who themselves did not have a written language. That everything is known about her is known via these white guys who were writing down their observations about her. She seems to be at once one of the important players in the Jamestown story and the one about whom the least is known. She would disappear for long periods of time from English eyes and all that time, she was having a life. She does appear to have been sort of an extraordinary person of, perhaps unusual intelligence and maturity. She does seem to have been a go-between for her father who was the paramount chief for a bunch of tribes in that area, and the English, and an entire national mythology has sprung up around her, and I felt I needed to do justice to that part of the history. ¶ Both the historical story and my novel are both I think actually quite male and a meditation on the phallic dimension of imperial expansion and warfare. And so I thought I needed at the center of the book a nice heavy shot of estrogen. And I think of her as being the most concentrated repository of moral intelligence in the book. ¶ And as for her voice—I do, actually, by virtue of having been a college teacher and having been a teacher of high school and middle school for a long time, I do spend a lot of time with 19-year-old girls and I do get to read their writing a lot. And so I think that is something I have internalized. I also wanted her to be a swirl of cultural influences. Oh, and I guess I should also mention that I have a secret wish to be a girl.

There is a point at which the book is a little difficult to swallow as timeless, however, because it does seem that there was really only one moment in history that one could actually look at European or American foreign policies with any sense of hope.



I'D LIKE TO THINK THE NOVEL AS A WHOLE OFFERS MULTIPLE POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION OF WHAT COLOR OR ETHNICITY ANY GIVEN CHARACTER IS •

[Laughs.] Well it depends on who "one" is in this scenario. There are some people who look at them even now with hope, which I don't entirely understand.

True. I guess I meant people not quite so invested in the success of American foreign policy.

So to be an indigenous person in America and to regard a sudden influx of settlers with a sense of hope. Well, I don't know, but aren't there people born into dreadful situations that have always already been compromised who, nonetheless, manage to be hopeful about the possibilities for an individual life to be good? I think there are.

Yet your book—and presumably, the original events at Jamestown—are both rife with massive, predictable violence. As well as the miscommunications that lead to violent acts and arise out of them.

I guess I construe my novel as a war novel and as such it's a meditation on the darker side of masculinity. And nobody, neither settler nor Indian, is spared that kind of scrutiny. As to the communications or language aspect of the book, I knew that I was writing a grim book as it was going along, and as I was counting up the number of violent acts that I had described or invented I felt a sort of mounting dismay over what I was depicting.

I have to interrupt: Why dismay?

I guess I was trying to take it seriously. I tried to have some personal investment in every act of violence that I was writing about. And I guess that was one of the reasons I named one of the characters after myself and then immediately killed him. Just to put some flesh in the game. ¶ Of course I can't help thinking that's also kind of funny to me and this is one of my problems, that many of things that are most deadly serious in the world I also find weirdly hilarious. I suppose laughter is the deep philosophical stance of the body about its own fragility. ¶ So I was dismayed by the rising body count. You know, if one is really invested in the world that one's writing in and bad stuff happens in it, it can kind of ruin your day, your nonfictional day. And yet I owed it to my vision of this moment in history—which was a terribly bloody, grim moment, and the founding moment of our country—to not

shrink away from that kind of violence. So I guess I offered myself and I hope my readers a lively, linguistic texture in which, even though, if there are people speaking English, they are maybe speaking two different languages. Even though there's constant miscommunication and duplicity, I would hope that there's also, in the act of talking, possible redemption. Whether through understanding or just through the beautiful things that language is capable of enacting.

It is sort of odd to be reading through some kind of bloody-arrow sequence or attack situation and find it kind of amusing. Or to find something in the same paragraph in which someone is being killed and think, "Oh I have to back and reread that, because that part was so beautiful," but then realize you also have to get through a death or loss of some kind of limb.

Well, I guess I think I'm happy that you have those multiple reactions. I think that's the goal in writing, is to fill each moment of the writing with the intensity and complexity that mirrors human experience. And I don't know about you but lots of stuff that happens to me and that I witness has more than one valence, means more than one thing, causes more than one feeling in my breast.

There's also a lot of sexual banter in the book, that mirrors what I understand to be the homoerotic language of the battlefield. And then with Pocohontas, of course, becoming a woman and being preoccupied with gettin' laid. There's almost constant action.

As a friend of mine would say, in almost every chapter, someone's down. I suppose there's this sense that if this is the originary myth of America, this is the story that spawned the 300 million people that we now are, so there is a kind of pro-creative energy that is a necessary part of originary myths. ¶ As I was reading the histories, particularly the first year of Jamestown, I was thinking, "All right. A hundred guys, on a boat. What are they doing for sex?" And the obvious answer seems to be . . .

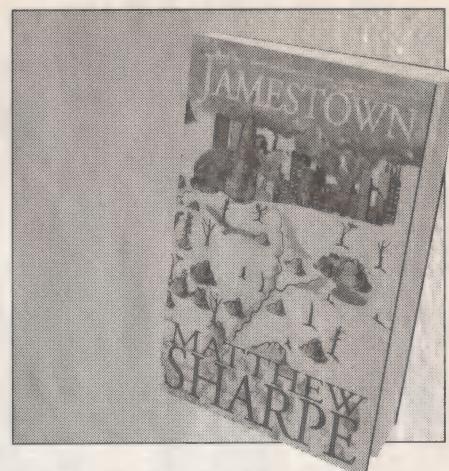
Each other.

Yes. [Laughs.] Very nicely put. And the only reference I came across to the possibility of homosexual love is, I think it's in the

account of George Percy. He was talking about this moment when the settlers were already running out of food within weeks after landing in Jamestown and one or two of the ships that took them there was still in the harbor. And the crew of the ships that were intending to leave, shortly, were still on board, and they had a separate supply of food. And the guy talks about how the settlers were having to trade with the crew for food, and what were they trading? They were trading trinkets and hatchets and copper and beads and *love*.

Wow.

It was just one of those really exciting moments in reading primary documents when just one tiny little word stands in for a whole lot of stuff that must have been going on. ¶ On one of my trips to Jamestown, I started having a conversation with a site interpreter who was dressed as an Indian woman of the period. Although she wasn't, really, otherwise she would have been naked. Or topless. But she was dressed in buck skin, and she was this red-haired Virginia Matron, and she was extremely knowledgeable, and nice, and she was posing as an Indian weaving a hempen basket, and I started asking her lots of questions about the lives of women at the time. I was furiously taking notes as she was answering my questions and she said at a certain point [adopts Virginia accent]: "now what are you taking all those notes for, are you writin' a historical romance?" And I said, "something along those lines." We talked for a while longer, and she kept answering my questions kind of brilliantly and then we get to the end and I'm thanking her and walking away and she says, over my shoulder, "now y'all put some *love* on that novel of yours." So maybe in a way that she didn't quite intend, she influenced putting *love* in that novel of mine. ¶ I guess in that way that I suppose both the good and the bad moments of cross cultural encounter have as a metaphor the cross-cultural encounter when the culture of the man and the culture of the woman meet in a love relationship, or for that matter the culture of when one man and another man meet in a love relationship, or two women. You know, just the idea that love between two people is always a cross-cultural encounter, even if they're next-door neighbors. ☺



**THAT'S THE GOAL
IN WRITING,
TO FILL EACH
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AND COMPLEXITY
THAT MIRRORS
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EXPERIENCE .**

NOTES FOR A STORY ABOUT PEOPLE WITH WEIRD PHOBIAS

There's a talk show.

- The host is "a regular guy."
- He has a New York accent. Or: a faint Boston accent, but not the WASPY kind.
- Host wears sweaters indicating regularness.
- Host's hair is thick and lush, slightly less than newscastery, but he is neither especially handsome nor unhandsome.
- He is fifty years old. Or: fifty-two.

The title of this episode is "Help! I'm Afraid of Wool!" It is about people with unusual phobias of seemingly innocuous things, maybe even things most people think are cute.

- Like say bunnies. The people seem completely genuine about these phobias, shaking even as they speak about them. Friends and family members attest to veracity of phobias and encroachment of phobias on lives of friends and family members.
- Other things people are afraid of on this episode: balloons, birds, clowns, milk, the front door, and the sky.

A SCENE: Host spends a few minutes talking to each phobic guest about the nature of their particular phobia.

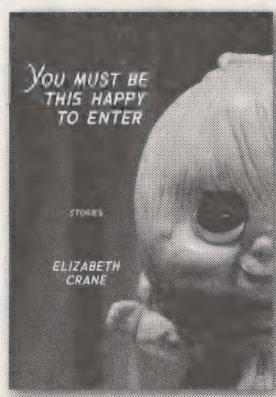
Why would you be afraid of balloons? host says, in that tone that says *That's crazy. That's crazy!* he says.

They're going to kill me someday, I know it, the guest replies.

Excerpted from the forthcoming collection of short stories by acclaimed author **Elizabeth Crane**, *You Must Be This Happy to Enter*.

Out in September from Punk Planet Books

www.punkplanetbooks.com



"Is it possible to be a punk and a mother?"

This was one of the first questions *Punk*

Planet put to former Jawbox bassist/cur-
rent DeSoto Records proprietor Kim Coletta—
also the proud mother of a beautiful five
year-old boy named Nick. To many, the world
of parenting must seem decidedly unpunk,
particularly among those who view the whole
heteronormative nuclear family thing with disdain.
But Kim's experience makes clear that there
is a way to balance a commitment to self-ex-
pression and feminism with the realization that
mainstream society will still perceive you as a
mother who must put the interests of her child
ahead of herself.

Initially, Kim seemed overwhelmed by the
possibility of trying to discuss the relationship
between her experiences in punk culture and
her life as a mother. Yet it seems that her life
as a mother has inspired a new direction for her
record label, as DeSoto will be releasing its first
compilation of children's music—with the per-
fect title *Play*—in April 2007. The record, fea-
turing such acts as Mudhoney, the Supersuck-
ers, Mary Timony, and Soccer Team, provides a
welcome alternative to the mind-numbing world
of mainstream children's music. There are no
purple dinosaurs here, only excellent musicians
intent on crafting creative songs that speak di-
rectly to children, not merely at them.

Her responses reveal that no aspect of our
identity remains forever static, and that one
can take on new roles and responsibilities
while still staying true to a set of core prin-
ciples. Having children and entering middle age
might not necessarily be "selling out": rather,
it may reveal that we have chosen to express
our commitments and beliefs in new, perhaps
more subtle, ways. This is not saying that hav-
ing children is not often a difficult and prob-
lematic decision—it most definitely is. Rather,
it is saying that it is about time that those in
underground culture begin to have much-needed
conversations on the realities of gender,
marriage, parenting, and aging. These issues
affects us all. Let's try to get it right.

Interview by Michael Carriere
Photos courtesy of Kim Coletta

I'm curious as to what your own childhood was
like. Did you come from a middle-class back-
ground? What do you remember most vividly
about your mom and your dad?

I grew up in Nashua, NH in the '70s

and '80s. With a population of around

60,000, it was hardly a metropolis, but
far from a quaint New England village.
I guess I would categorize our family as
lower middle class—both my parents were
teachers. My brother and I never wanted
for anything growing up, but there weren't
any extravagances like "cool" clothes or
much travel. My parents were both around
21 when they had me and my sense look-
ing back is that our whole family did a
lot of growing up together. My mom was
smart, energetic, an active feminist, and
just really good to be around. My dad had
a more authoritarian style; he taught elec-
trical engineering and I think he wanted
his home life to be as ordered as an engi-
neering process . . . which of course it was
far from. My brother and I were always a
little scared of him, but when he relaxed,
he had a wicked sense of humor and was
fun to be with. I grew up and was always
more "lippy" than my brother. ¶ My par-
ents divorced when I was 16 years old and
my brother was 12; it hit him a lot harder
than me. I was old enough to understand
that it was definitely for the best. Oddly
enough, for the time especially, my mom
moved out into an apartment and let my
dad keep the house. Even odder, both my
brother and I chose to stay with my father
as all our friends were in that neighbor-
hood. It didn't last long for me and I ended
up leaving and living with my mom in that
year before college.

You left New Hampshire to go to college in
Washington, DC. Is that where you got into
punk rock?

I was involved in the punk scene before I
lived in Washington, DC. At the end of
junior high and throughout high school, I
hung out with a group of kids and we were
all into the hardcore music scene. We used
to drive to Boston every chance we got to
go to all-ages hardcore matinees on Sun-
day afternoons—Minutemen, Circle Jerks,
Black Flag, the Dickies, Dead Kennedys.

Was the move to Washington somewhat in-
spired by the presence of Dischord and other
punk icons in that region?

I know this sounds terrible, but one of
the reasons I wanted to go to college in
DC was because I knew their music scene

was rumored to be really good! I started
meeting people into the music scene at
my school like Jenny Toomey (Tsunami /
Simple Machines) and David Grubbs
(Squirrelbait, Bastro, Gastr del Sol). I
actually bought my first bass guitar off
of David; it was a basic, but sweet Fender
Precision. When I moved off campus in
my sophomore year, I happened to be in
the same neighborhood as a group house
where Amy Pickering (Fire Party) and
others were living. It was at a party there
that I first met Ian MacKaye and some
other DC people. After that, I started
making a lot more friends from the DC
music scene and attending lots of shows.

**As a woman, how did you fit into what has al-
ways been a male-dominated scene?**

I understood early on that the DC scene
was really different than the Boston scene.
Basically, it was much less violent and not
as male-dominated. Women, while not
the majority in the mid-'80s, were re-
ally involved and doing some important
things in DC. As far as fitting into a male-
dominated scene . . . it wasn't ever a prob-
lem for me. I liked hanging out with "the
guys" and always felt I represented women
well just by getting up on that stage in

**I think kids can do
more for themselves
from an early age than
many parents and
educators give them
credit for.**

Jawbox and rocking as hard as I could. I
felt like that, in and of itself, made a fem-
inist statement with no additional rants
necessary.

At a Jawbox show in the early 1990s at City
Gardens (a now defunct nightclub in Trenton,
NJ), I listened to a number of male concert at-
tendees comment on how "hot" you were. Even
today, your name occasionally appears on lists
that catalog the "sexiest women in rock." How
did you initially respond to that attention, and
what do you think about it today?

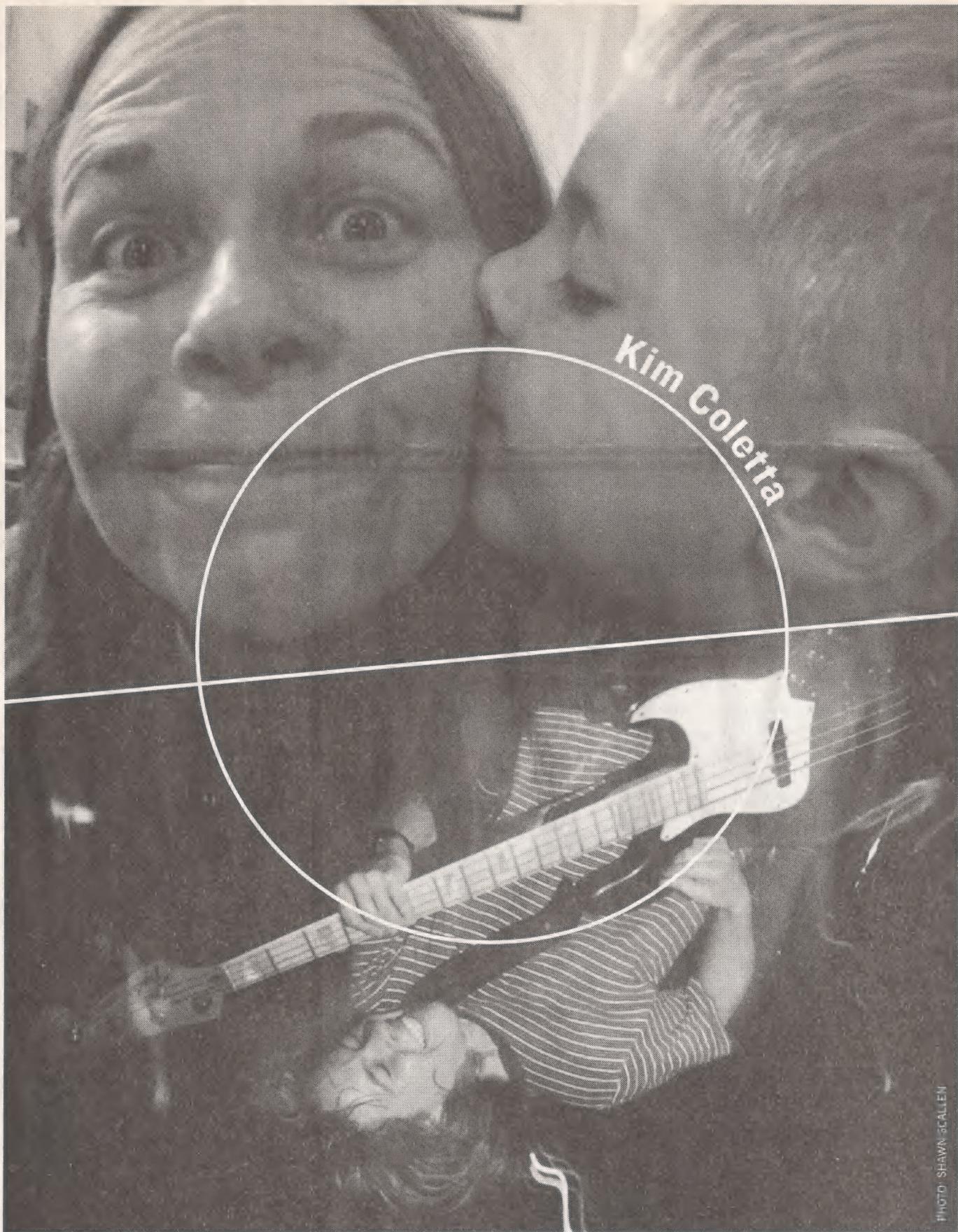


PHOTO: SHAWN SCALLEN



Wow, Trenton, NJ . . . well, Trenton was super guy-heavy at the shows. It's weird, some towns were just like that—like the women didn't get the memo that this is a cool, fun scene to be a part of. But maybe they were turned off by some of the knuckleheads who would go to the shows; I'm not sure. Really, I rarely heard comments like the above because most men who made them either had enough of a filter to not make them directly to me or were too chickenshit to! To this day, I'm a bit surprised anyone would make those comments; did anyone take a good look at me? I didn't wear makeup, wore jeans and a T-shirt mostly, and was literally drenched in sweat about two songs into the set!

I've interviewed many people in the independent music world that seem to think that being in bands/doing labels/running fanzines precluded them from living a "normal" life, i.e. finding a spouse, having children, and other such things. Yet you seem to have found these things through your involvement with punk.

This is a tricky issue. I certainly don't think that being involved in the music scene precludes you from falling in love and having a great relationship. But then

again, I fell in love with my bandmate Bill [Bill Bardot, guitarist for Jawbox] and we were able to physically be together through all the years of touring. There were some years that Jawbox was on the road nine months out of the year and it would have been hard to be apart that much. I did see many of my fellow musicians struggling with loneliness and doubt with partners at home while they were touring. For me, having children would have been untenable in my Jawbox years. I mean, we were touring in a van playing in smoky nightclubs; you don't bring a kid around in that kind of environment. It's much more possible to run a label or club or do a zine and have a "normal" family life. ¶ Our son Nick was born in June 2001, making him a big Kindergartner now. Bill and I started dating in 1991 and got married in 1997 so it definitely wasn't a spontaneous decision. And I feel that for a solid couple, a child, whether planned or unplanned, is a beautiful event.

How would you describe yourself as a mom? Does your history in the punk scene play a role in the way you see yourself as a parent?

I think I'm generally a fun, upbeat mom with some human, cranky moments that I don't bother to hide from my son. My parenting style stems from the fact that Nick is a very smart, stubborn and independent kid . . . and also a physical daredevil. I try to strike a good balance between giving him some space while at the same time setting some limits with him. I wish it could be all fun and games, but as every parent knows that's just not possible. The skill I'm working on the most is trying to be a more patient mom! ¶ My time in the music scene probably does inform my parenting in once big way and that's a certain DIY ethic. I think kids can do more for themselves from an early age than many parents and educators give them credit for. If it's not a matter of health or safety, I try to slow down and let Nick figure out how to do things himself, whether we're talking pouring a glass of soymilk or puzzling over a Lego kit. But my feminism informs my parenting more than my time in the indie scene. My mom was very involved with the feminist movement in the 1970s. She was the President of our local chapter of NOW, the National Organization for Women, and played an important role in a court case to keep *Ms. Magazine* in our local high school library [Salvail vs. Nashua Board of Education, 1979]. For me, feminism is about having the right to do what you want to do

"I purposefully kept DeSoto lean and flexible so it could ebb and flow with the natural rhythm of my own life."

in life, while not being embarrassed or forsaking what is unique and wonderful about being a woman. Pre-motherhood I always figured I'd eventually have a girl and teach her to be a strong woman. ¶ When I had my baby and the midwife said, "it's a boy," I had to adjust my thinking slightly. Now I feel like I have awesome goal of raising Nick to be a good, enlightened man.

Is there any sense that you traded in being an artist or cultural producer to become a wife and a mom, two roles that often carry signifi-

cant—and, to punk culture, often negative—cultural baggage?

Jawbox ended in 1997 because we felt we'd accomplished what we wanted to as a band and were all ready to try our hand at new things. I've always called DeSoto Records a labor of love and I guess I mean that literally—it hardly ever makes any money!—and figuratively: I care about the bands and their music like they're family. Over the years, I purposefully kept DeSoto lean and flexible, in part so it could ebb and flow with the natural rhythm of my own life. So there have been times when I have a lot of bands and am very busy and times when it's more mellow. There is no rock-solid correlation between Nick's birth and DeSoto activity; I released more records than I ever had before a couple years after his birth. ¶ Around 2000, I wanted to exercise my brain again, so I got a Master's in Library Science. Right now I'm working part of each week on the label and part-time in an all boys' middle school teaching information literacy. They may seem like disparate careers to some, but I find

they mesh together quite well. It's all about using information in smart and beautiful and creative ways. ¶ I'm in a quiet DeSoto time currently and I'm just working on releasing this children's record. It's definitely true that I'm not as active in the music scene in terms of getting out to shows, conferences, etc. But to me it just feels like a natural progression in my life and not some kind of decline in my cultural production. My outreach consists of mentoring people who come to me for help, whether it's how to get a show, start a label, etc. It's not as flashy as being on stage, but it gives me a quiet satisfaction.

Was your son the impetus behind the decision to put together the Play compilation?

Nick listens to all types of music and of course I don't think kids *need* to listen to "kid music." That being said, younger kids do respond very much to music and lyrics that are silly, whimsical, and playful. I thought it would be wonderful to do a record that kids would be attracted to and wouldn't make parents cringe. If your kids have ever taken a shine to dreck like Bar-

ney or the Wiggles then you know what I'm talking about!

How did you get bands to come onboard for the project?

I collaborated on this record with my friend Susie Tennant, a longtime participant in the Seattle music scene. Basically, we contacted bands we were friends with, pitched the project and if they were interested we gave them recording money. I was so impressed at how creative the bands were, both with the lyrics and the songwriting.

How do you expose a child to what you consider "good" music while letting them develop their own independent tastes?

I figure all you can do is play a wide variety of music for your kids; the rest is up to them. My son is at the age where peer influence is huge and he comes home from school and birthday parties singing shit like "Who Let the Dogs Out" and "I Like to Move It." So I just suck it up and sing them with him! But he also sings "Two-Headed Boy" by Neutral Milk Hotel so I can take solace in that. ☺



Berlin is a city forever skewed by romantic visions—its essence secluded in cinema reels, orchestral melodies, and framed in photographs. It's where artists flock, drawing inspiration from the vast boulevards and sprawling parks, the rattling U-Bahn and the amount of sheer space. Space to move and think and, most importantly, space to create. This is the city where British quartet Electrelane recently gathered to write their fourth album, *No Shouts No Calls*. Hailing from Brighton, England, Electrelane vocalist Verity Susman and Drummer Emma Gaze have been making music together since 1998. Over the years, the band has shifted lineups, but with the addition of guitarist Mia Clarke in 2000 and bassist Ros Murray in 2004, it feels as though they have finally cemented into a whole.

Writing in Berlin is new for Electrelane, whose three previous records were all written, Susman says, in "a crummy studio in Brighton." The songs forged there are all about escaping their immediate environment, as with 2002's *The Power Out*—an album imbued with occasional bursts of multi-lingual song, drawing its musical and lyrical reference points from Germany, Russia, France, and Spain while marrying writings from 15th century Catalan poet Juan Boscán Almogávar with German philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche.

In Berlin, the band's gallivanting melodies and rejoicing hymnal choruses sound more at home—like the repetitive refrain of "To the East," where Susman's vocals seem to soar clear of the music, reiterating the lines "This could be home" with renewed assurance each time. It's a record of joyful abandon, uniting strong confident keyboard strokes with bold ebullient guitar riffs—a dramatic departure from last year's *Axes*, where even the jubilance of songs like "Bells" seemed to shift under a heaving sadness.

No Shouts No Calls is a quixotic title considering it's the first almost entirely non-instrumental record the band has made; lyrically and musically, the album is more personal and less distanced than their previous endeavors. When Susman sings about Berlin as home, she really does mean it—she's been living there for the past two years. On *No Shouts No Calls* Electrelane create genuine camaraderie out of isolation—living apart throughout the year in Berlin, London, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and only coming together again to make music.

Punk Planet tracked down Electrelane, in four separate interviews in different time zones—on the phone, in my apartment and via email—to talk about their mutual love of a great city.

Interview by **Beth Capper**

Photo by **Louis Decamps**

Can you tell me about your experiences writing your most recent record in Berlin?

Clarke: Before we all met in Berlin we had no idea what was going to happen at all. I think we were all happily surprised at how organically the music came. A huge part of that has to do with being in Berlin and I think this record sounds more positive because we all felt more positive.

Gaze: For me personally, I felt like it was really quite easy, in that, it came very naturally and there wasn't a moment where I thought, "shit, this isn't working." We almost didn't make another record, so I feel like we were all quite buoyed up and excited to actually be doing it.

Murray: It was very different from making *Axes*, which was written in a small room in autumn in Brighton, and then recorded in winter in Chicago. It was very much an insular record I think, we were exploring what we could do by kind of moving inwards.

Susman: We didn't have very long to write the album so from that point of view it was a lot of work to produce all the lyrics. I was writing them right up till the last minute. I wanted to make it more personal than *The Power Out*, which had been lyrics taken from other places but this time it just felt right to have something a bit more personal because of where we were writing the record.

I understand you just had some interesting band photos taken in Paris.

Clarke: It was hilarious. We did it with this guy Louis Decamps, who is a big fashion photographer. He told us beforehand about this filmmaker called Emir Kusturica. He wanted to take stills from one of his films and re-do them but he didn't say exactly what we would be doing. He set up this whole glitzy wedding and he had a whole pig on the table and this background with trout and wine. Then, after the wedding, it's all mayhem and Emma's got a black eye and

she's all sprawled across the table drunk and in a fight, Verity's pulling my veil and I've got my foot in a big wedding cake. Then, they were like, "OK, we've got you (mocks a French accent) *ze harneses!*"—and they put us in harnesses and boiler suits and hung us by rope from the ceiling holding different instruments.

After nine years of making music, does the fact that music critics still write about you in gendered terms irritate you?

Clarke: I think in the early days we felt the brunt of sexism in the music industry more than we do now, although, I read this review when *Axes* came out where this male reviewer said: "And it seems as though Steve Albini took Mia under his wing and initiated her into how to create dark and heavy riffs," or something like that. Obviously that's completely ridiculous because he has absolutely no input into the music whatsoever.

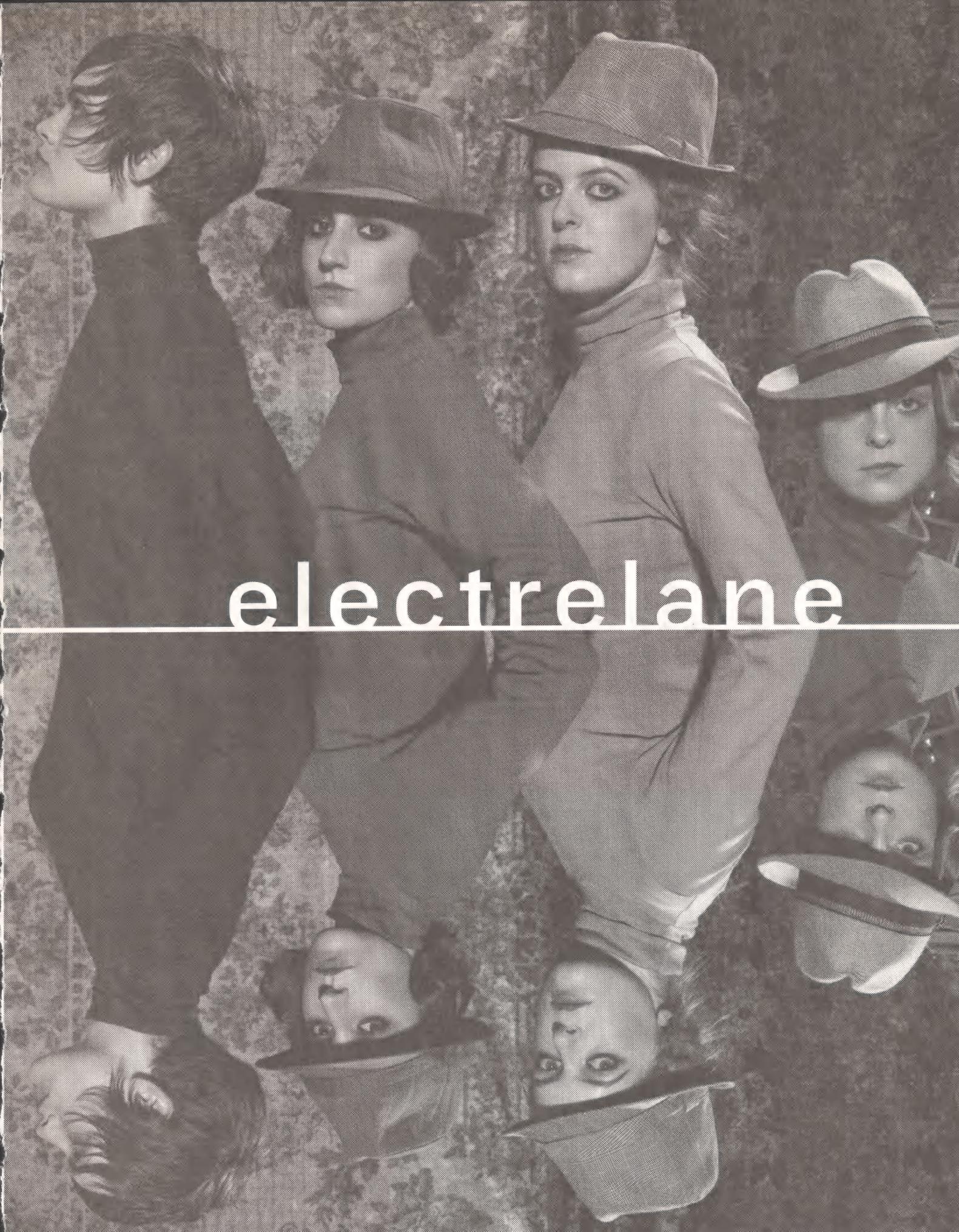
Gaze: I'd be lying if I said it didn't bother me, but I think after nine years it bothers me a lot less. There is a hell of a lot more female membered bands around now than when we first started, so I'm feeling that the novelty might *almost* be gone.

Murray: I don't think just the fact of being female makes you a feminist, so why should the fact of being a female in a band make you a feminist band? It seems misleading to say that. We make music, and we want people to listen to it as music, not as music made by women.

Susman: A few years ago I just stopped reading any press about us because I found it really uncomfortable. Not necessarily because of gender stuff, but just in general. I feel that we're just getting on and doing what we want now and not paying too much attention to what other people think.

What do you do when you're not doing Electrelane?

Clarke: I'm writing a book called *The Cinema Sheet*. Fundamentally, it's about someone who has obsessive compulsive disorder and the extremes that having that disorder can take you to. So much of it is still in my head, so it's a long way off being finished. I've done three collections of poems, one written in Prague, one in Berlin, and one in Chicago. I'm also doing a book with Sara Jaffe (*ex-Erase Errata*). It's a collection of musician's and artist's



electrelane

responses to being on the road, so there's writing and photography and artwork. We've got Thurston Moore, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Jem Cohen, and Jeffrey Lewis so far.

Gaze: I've done practically all the photography for the band. I like doing it and I can't imagine handing over the look of the band's records to anyone else. I mostly take Polaroids and have far too many different types of cameras.

Murray: At the moment I'm doing my solo project Ray Rumours and Sisisi Sisisi Sisi with my girlfriend Ochi. We recorded a tape for Undereducated Records on the cliffs above the sea in Almeria this summer. It was really beautiful; we were under the light of the moon and could hear the waves below. It was in the ruins of an abandoned iron mine, and we just left the tape running and played all our songs.

period of time was when I worked out that I wanted to write fiction. I spent so much time in my imagination making up stories.

Gaze: I grew up in a very large family. There was my mum and nine children—I am number eight. Because there are so many of us, the house was always kind of crazy—as in, people running in and out, and music and shouting and projects. My mum instilled in us the importance of being creative—she is an artist—and we were always making something/breaking something/trying to fix something. We moved to a little island in Greece when I was nine. It was this totally isolated, hot, rock in the middle of the sea. We got beaten up everyday for about the first five months at school. Later, we would just bunk off altogether and go and sit in the ruins reading. Not ancient Greek ruins, it wasn't that romantic—ruins from the second-world war.

they never had the chance so it was really important to them when they had children that they would be able to learn instruments. I started playing the piano when I was five and other instruments after that.

Did you have any kind of special moments early on in your youth that cemented your desire to make music?

Clarke: When I was 16 I wrote a letter to Ian McKaye. I wanted to go to a Fugazi show in Brighton but the age limit was 18 so I thought that if I didn't get into the show, I would get this letter to him. It was typical teenage gushing! I inevitably got turned away because I didn't look old enough and as I turned to go back I bumped into them. I explained what had happened and they got me into the show. I still gave him the letter and he wrote back. It was after that show that I got my first guitar. Seeing Fugazi that day was the most powerful



Susman: I have a side project called Vera November, the impetus of which was being asked to record a cover of Arthur Russell's "Our Last Night Together." I enjoyed doing it, and after that I just kept on writing things.

Tell me about your childhoods.

Clarke: Between the ages of seven and 10 I travelled with my parents. We went to India and Sri Lanka first, and then we were mostly in Asia and South-East Asia. I don't think that anything I would have learnt at school could have compared to being in those places. Being a kid and travelling played a huge part in shaping me as an adult. I think that whole

Murray: Well, my Great Great Granddad edited the first Oxford English Dictionary. It's quite an interesting story, because the main contributor was in a psychiatric hospital and ended up cutting off his own penis. There's been a book written about their relationship called *The Professor and the Madman*. I grew up with two older brothers, and one of them was really naughty as a teenager and used to steal things and sell them in order to buy drugs. One time he tried to steal "Q" from the first edition of the OED. My parents have a copy and it's very rare and valuable.

Susman: My parents both wanted to learn instruments when they were younger and

show I've ever seen in my life. If I hadn't seen that show, there is no way that I would be in Electrelane.

Gaze: Every Sunday morning was dancing morning in our house. We would all take it in turns to pick a song and then everyone would dance.

Murray: Me and my brother had a band from when we were really little—I think I was about three and he was five. He is totally tone deaf and because I was younger we made music the way he thought it was supposed to be, which mainly involved jumping up and down on the piano and screaming, and banging things with wooden spoons and hammers. ☺

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Lots of bands form when friends realize they play compatible instruments. But not many bands then go on a multi-day retreat to hash out their shared political vision and strategic action plan.

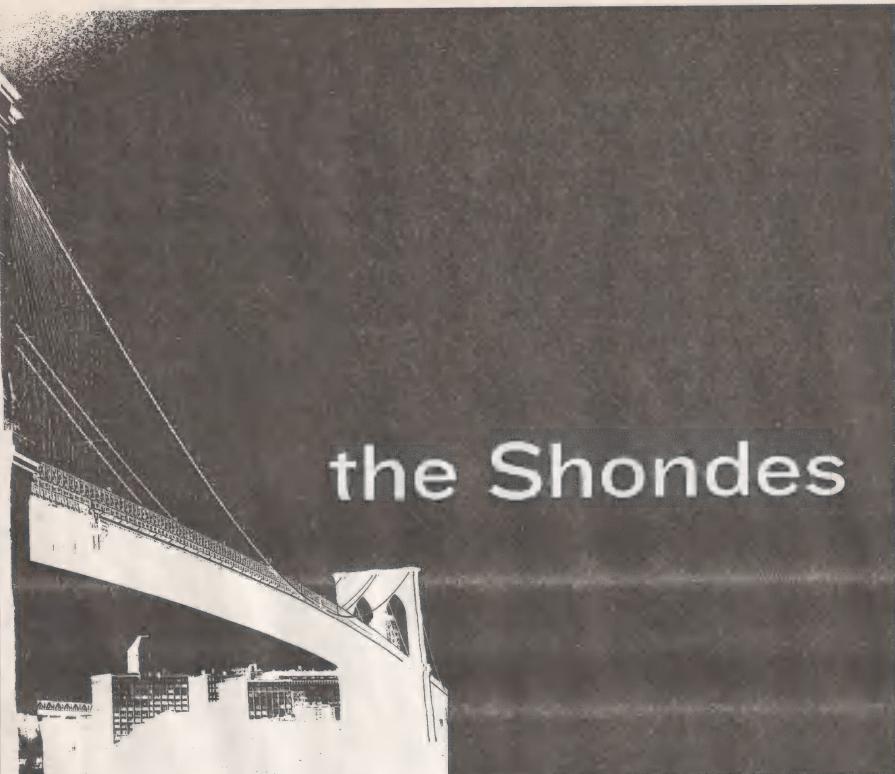
Seamlessly fusing art and politics, the Shondes include Louisa Solomon on bass, Temim Fruchter on drums, Ian Brannigan on guitar, and Elijah Oberman on violin. Together they make up a Brooklyn-based band of self-identified "queers and trannies, radicals, Jewish and non-Jewish Palestine-solidarity activists," who bring their treble-heavy contrapuntal punk to bear on subjects ranging from state-sponsored violence to sexual abuse.

In addition to their independent activist work, they organize events that merge community celebration and political content, building connections with other political musicians, activists and artists. Recent events include a Valentine's Day benefit for the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, a group that "works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression;" Pesach Rock, a Passover showcase that included Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and Jews Against the Occupation [JATO]; and a Chanukah Ball benefiting JATO, emceed by Ms. JewSA and including a local radical marching band and Joe Lally.

Interview by **Rebecca Fureigh**

Can you give a real quick working definition of what Zionism or anti-Zionism is?

Solomon: Zionism is the belief in having an ethnically and religiously defined Jewish state. I choose to identify as an anti-Zionist in this particular era where Zionism has sort of codified itself into a sort of meaning supporting the modern state of Israel, which is an ethnically Jewish-defined state that wants to have a Jewish majority, which by necessity means the displacement or the killing of non-Jews. For me, as a Jew and as a person, that's unacceptable and has been unacceptable since 1948, when Palestinians were displaced and murdered in the



state today. What the price is for Palestinian communities.

Why call yourself "the Shondes?"

Fruchter: It means disgrace or outrage or shame. We've expanded it to "monstrosity." [Laughs.] And "scandal." We liked the name because it's connected to a Yiddish tradition that we all have respect for and are connected to in different ways, and it also describes the ways that being radical, being queer, being trans, being anti-occupation Jews and being a whole bunch of other things means that you're called a shonde.

Solomon: When we decided to start the band, we were like, "We really need to come up with a name that captures the politic that we're trying to *do* through the music." And when we came up with the Shondes there was kind of no going back, because this is one word that both pays homage to the Yiddish tradition that we're talking about but also stakes our place: we wanna be a band that from the margins is able to make amazing music that's really about stuff. In more mainstream press, [this] is a really good opening for us to

start talking about the politics that might not otherwise come up. It was definitely a strategic decision . . . we certainly did want something that would be a platform for the politics.

Did the band form around the intent to have that political content?

Fruchter: We all were close in different ways through being in the same community and we all did various activism work together, three of us in Jews Against the Occupation. So it was kind of a given that we wanted to make music that was integrated in that, that to us, being in a band and being radical and being activists weren't separate things.

Solomon: For us as queers and as radical Jews, you know, what's *important* to us is all political. And so when we make music, because it's an expression of who we are and what's important to us and what we value, it is always political, whether it's a love song or whether it's about Palestine. ¶ Shut out or being marginalized in different ways and wanting to make art from that experience, because it's *painful* to live marginalized lives, and so we all in our communities are trying to celebrate that and build

interest of creating that state, and it continues to be unacceptable. ¶ I think it can be really confusing and misleading language, because a lot of people have talked about Zionism as meaning "a space for Jews to be safe." I think that a lot of Jews are attached to the concept of Zionism because they associate it with fleeing the Nazis. They associate it with Jewish community. They associate it with a lot of things that of course I empathize with deeply and understand the need for. But in a context where I am using that language, I think that's what it means for me, is trying to stand really clearly in opposition to Israeli policy and to what it really means to uphold the Israeli

connections with each other, and—art is one area that you can express that, and all of that is therapeutic for both the people making it and the people hopefully experiencing it or listening to it.

What do you do with that when someone comes to you? Do you try to connect them to other resources?

Solomon: —“How accountable are you to your fan base?” [Laughs.]

Fruchter: It’s a good question. Mostly I think that just talking with people—at shows, we love to have people set up tables and give out information and in a couple of the cities that we played in, there was someone who was Jewish and was looking to do some kind of action in solidarity with Palestine and Lebanon, because of the attacks on Lebanon over the summer, and so they would get up on the stage and say, “Are there other Jews here who would be interested in this?” Because those are the kinds of people that might come out to a show by a band called the Shondes.

Solomon: Particularly when we’re touring the country, we know a lot less well than anyone in their own community what resources are present and what they wanna get connected to or what they wanna be working on. When it was appropriate we did connect people to resources and I certainly talked with people about the international solidarity movement or specific things that people tend to ask about. But I think our role as a band is more about bridging emotional and artistic experiences to the political stuff and having those not be in separate realms. And that creates a space, like Temim’s saying, where people who are there can connect to people in their own community through that or can ask questions that lead them to do their own self-education or to finding stuff. ¶ I’ve had the blessing of learning from a lot of bands before, bands like Bikini Kill, who changed my life. And they didn’t change my life because I met them and they told me, “Go talk to this organization.” They changed my life because they were, like, this soundtrack that moved me to do activism and moved me to educate myself. I think that’s far more effective. It’s a visceral movement rather than a let-me-tell-you-what-to-do.

Fruchter: Sincerity, I think, is something that is so avoided in rock spaces right now, in hipster spaces, in indie spaces. It’s like there’s a feeling that things are apolitical because political is sincere and sincere is taboo. ¶ I didn’t come out of riot girl, but any time that I felt connected to some kind of radical soundtrack like Louisa’s talking about, I felt like it was because there were people out there taking themselves seriously and that made everyone else sort of stop laughing at themselves for a second and just stop and think and be quiet and be with the ideas in the room.

I’m curious as to how your work is received and the role you see it taking in queer communities, Jewish communities, radical communities . . .

Solomon: Certainly those communities overlap and depending on where you are, they look different. I think that queer and trans communities tend to receive us very well and very readily and very quickly. I think that similarly, any radical Jew is pretty immediately interested in some way and invested in what we do, simply because there’s a media blackout on representing our point of view as progressive Jews, as any Jew being even remotely critical of Israel. ¶ But almost more interesting, I think, is when we play spaces that are not explicitly queer, not necessarily radically identified, not activist identified, not Jewish identified. Like, you know, we played Morgantown, West Virginia, or we played a lot of different places. And a lot of times the connections we’re able to make with people over music bridged to those conversations really seamlessly and effectively. I think that’s great, and a lot of times people who are activist-identified or queer-identified are too quick to assume that they won’t connect with people outside of those communities. I’ve been really amazed by how readily we’re received almost everywhere we’ve gone, regardless of exactly what community was inviting us in.

Fruchter: We get asked often how the mainstream Jewish community receives us, and I mean—they haven’t so much . . .

Solomon: [Laughs.] They haven’t noticed! Or maybe they’ve noticed and they’re ig-

noring. I think people always assume that the mainstream Jewish community abhors us and cracks down on us and—you know, pickets us or whatever. And maybe it’ll happen someday. But so far, I think it’s to their benefit to pretend that this isn’t a viable form of art or a viable community that we’re in. ¶ That’s the whole power of this media blackout and the lack of representation of radical Jewishness is that they can just pretend Jews who are critical of Zionism don’t exist, and that always works for them better than engagement. They don’t want that debate.

How do your families react to what you do?

Fruchter: The band has actually been a huge catalyst for my family, who are very traditional Jews and very Zionist, to deal with my politics and to be in conversation with them about it. They ask me, “What does it mean that you call your band the Shondes? Is that about hating yourself? Is that about actually thinking that Jews are disgraceful or that Israel is horrible?” Because it’s my family it’s been incredibly hard, but it gave me the opportunity to talk to them about, “No, actually I’m a very passionate Jewish person, this is what’s moved me to do a project like the Shondes and to play music and to write songs about the work that I do as a Jewish person. And Shonde is a word that makes me feel proud to not be sort of in the box, the way that I grew up about what it means to be Jewish and what it means to be in the world.” Because they’re religious Zionists and I am an anti-Zionist making music about that, and also a committed Jew who’s in a band with my community and it’s all very loving and exciting to me, and to them it’s hateful. And you know, many people deal with that with their families. It’s just very public right now.

Solomon: My dad thinks our band is great, and I was raised pretty secular and pretty critical of Zionism, so it’s a different story for me. I think that it’s interesting in a lot of Jewish queers’ experience that the queer stuff is a huge problem for sure for a lot of people, but that coming out as queer, coming out as trans—all of that was a huge problem in different ways and caused fights in the family, but the thing that nearly broke everything apart



"I think our role as a band is more about bridging emotional and artistic experiences to the political stuff and having those not be in separate realms."

was the criticism of Zionism. It's like, to a certain extent, the family could stretch and stretch and stretch and stretch and be stressed and there would be fighting and I'm not saying it was easy around queer and trans stuff, but it's criticizing Zionism and taking a stand in solidarity with Palestine that nearly gets Temim kicked out of the family.

Describe what you're doing musically.

Fruchter: We're bringing together a number of different musical trainings and traditions and ways of making music that move all of us. There are elements of classical music in what we do—that manifests defi-

nately in our composition and in the way that we try to stray away from the feeling of solos and write, play and perform collaboratively. We also use a lot of vocal counterpoint, which comes, among other things, from a classical tradition and is about two melody lines in conversation with each other both lyrically but also musically, and that creates a texture that we like and also a feeling about a song that feels really collaborative and conversational and exciting. We bring in feminist and political punk, and a lot of that comes out of influences from the riot girl tradition. We also bring in Jewish melodies of different kinds, everything from sort of Yiddish-y music conventions to old ancient Jewish liturgy.

What's your songwriting process like?

Solomon: It's very multifaceted. I think sometimes a song starts with a concept

that comes out of a conversation all four of us are having. On the other hand somebody writes a bass line or a guitar line or a violin line or a drum part and we sit down and it spurs the other piece, you know, and I think that all of those options can work. But the thing that they all have in common in our case is that collaborative piece where at some point the majority of what we do is gonna be everyone working together and everyone contributing.

Fruchter: When we wrote "I Watched the Temple Fall," one of our early songs together as a band, the process—for me it was like being in a candy store. I didn't know how to write songs. It was just sort of like, I love music, music moves me, but I don't know what I'm doing. And to be in a room together with people and realize that we can do with this whatever we want and bring in anything that moves us was incredibly exciting. ☺

Many people inside and outside the punk community don't know who Todd Congelliere is, but the former FYP singer/guitarist says he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I feel like everything I do has nothing to do with the music industry, even though it does," Congelliere, founder of San Pedro, Calif., based Recess Records and singer/guitarist of Toys That Kill, says. "Major labels have this piece of the pie and independent labels have this piece of the pie and I'm part of that piece of the pie, but I don't want to be a part of that pie. I hate being a part of that pie."

The 34-year-old started Recess Records when he was a teenage fan of 7 Seconds and the Germs. He saw it as a way to spend the cash he was generating from a burgeoning professional skateboarding career, bought a four-track recorder and quickly recorded two demo tapes, which he jokingly says "can't be overlooked." His first official release was FYP's *Extra Credit* 7 inch, an off-time, off-key sloppy-yet-raw 11-song EP that featured Congelliere playing guitar and bass and singing with help from a touch-pad drum machine. He followed that record with FYP's second 7 inch, the *Made in USA* EP, which again found Congelliere singing and playing guitar and bass with the addition of future Reel Big Fish drummer Carlos de la Garza.

Congelliere took a major step when, in 1990, he released Garden Weasel's *Without Direction* 7 inch, his first Recess release not featuring Congelliere as a performer. It was a project that came about after following some advice from a fellow skater, Congelliere says.

"(There was) this guy who used to skate my ramp who I kind of looked up to," Congelliere says. "He was an outsider and he called me up. He used to be in a band, but they broke up. All the guys except him started a band called Garden Weasel and he said I should put it out. I was like, 'Woah, putting out somebody else. That's weird,' but he was like, 'Well, you got a label,' and I thought, 'I guess I kind of do.'"

Congelliere sold 500 copies of the Garden Weasel record, what he calls "punk platinum" by today's standards, and stepped up his game. He transformed FYP into a live band with the help of friend/bassist Jed Schipper and with momentum from new releases began taking the show on the road.

FYP's brand of snotty thrash attracted a

cross-breed of fans including skaters, punks, and hardcore kids. The group, which by this time had gone through a handful of lineup changes involving more than 20 members, Congelliere says, started earning national recognition thanks to the band's second full-length, the *Dance My Dunce* LP. The record blended distorted guitars with poppy undertones and tackled sarcastic lyrical issues such as not fitting in with the jocks on "Fuck You & A Half," parental indiscretion on "Vacation Bible School" and the death of Skrewdriver singer Ian Stuart on "Ian Stuart as a Crash Dummy."

The now-trio, featuring singer/guitarist Congelliere, bassist Schipper and drummer de la Garza, was primed for the big time when de la Garza was replaced by new skinsman Sean Cole. This lineup entered the studio with Dwarves front man Blag Dahlia for 1996's *Toilet Kids Bread*, an album that showcased the band's growing penchant for melody and three-chord pop. The record's new sound, along with Congelliere's learning-on-the-job business sense with Recess, got the now-former skater into trouble with fans who disagreed with FYP's new direction and distributors who were angered with the small number of records initially pressed by Congelliere. "When *Toilet Kids Bread* came out, FYP was big," Congelliere says. "I didn't press enough and distributors were yelling at me. Within a week, we were getting nasty, 'We're going to kill you' letters. Like, 'You faggots, you should move to San Francisco and move in with Green Day.' They were coming in every day. I wrote back to the first three. I would write them nothing that had anything to do with what they were talking about. None of them wrote back. In my mind, it wasn't so different. To me, we were just going into the studio to make another record. I didn't think much of it until people started talking shit. I see it as just growing, you don't question it. It helped me feel secure about it because I didn't want these people coming to our shows. A couple I had to write back and tell them they were banned from buying Recess stuff. Not only mail order, but you can't even go to the stores."

Congelliere took the distributors' words to heart for Recess' next release, a full-length record by a Ramones-influenced trio from New York called Furious George featuring former *Maximum Rocknroll* columnist George Tabb. The album had high expectations, but Congel-

liere says he pressed too many copies and still has not re-cooped costs.

Schipper left FYP soon after the recording of *Toilet Kids Bread*, and the band enlisted Joe "Stoots" Ciauri tour in support of the record. This era found FYP's popularity at its peak thanks to the new lineup, which was tighter and more cohesive than ever before, and its third full-length, *My Man Grumpy*, which carried on the new pop-influenced sounds. The trio's stock continued rising until the suicide of Ciauri on Jan. 14, 1998. Congelliere and Cole took time off to consider their next move before carrying on with the band and later asked San Pedro local and current Mike Watt and the Missingmen drummer Raul Morales to play drums, switching Cole from behind the kit to bass.

FYP's new lineup of Congelliere, Cole, and Morales continued touring and recorded a demo for the band's final album, which didn't see the light of day until Congelliere issued FYP's *5 Year Plan* LP as Recess No. 100 in June 2006. Congelliere and Cole decided to throw in the towel on FYP, but wanted to finish the record they had begun. The duo, along with Dahlia again at the helm, recorded the *Toys That Kill* LP with drummer Josh Freese and performed a final FYP show with Morales to a packed room at the Showcase Theatre in Corona. The next day saw the unveiling of the pair's next project: *Toys That Kill*.

Toys That Kill is a continuation of FYP, Congelliere says, but with one noticeable difference. This time around, the band is intent on keeping a solid lineup and to date has kept intact the original trio of singer/guitarist Congelliere, guitarist/singer Cole and bassist Casey "Chachi" Ferrara, along with third drummer and former Icarus Line member Mike "Jimmy" Felix. The band has released three full-length albums and a slew of singles to coincide with many national tours.

Toys that Kill have recently slowed their pace due to Cole's entry into culinary school and Ferrara's job as a longshoreman in San Pedro. This break allowed Congelliere the opportunity to start a new project called the Underground Railroad to Candyland with TTK drummer Felix and two San Pedro locals. Although they originally had no desire to formally release anything, the group changed its mind and has completed a Japanese tour in March 2007.

Interview by **Ryan Ritchie**



"I never expected to play to more than 30 people—ever."

"It wasn't like I wanted to be a musician at all; I hated musicians. I just wanted a piece of vinyl to show to my grandkids."



Which came first, FYP or Recess?

Recess came because of FYP, on accident. It was all intertwined. I bought a four-track because I didn't have anything to spend my money on. I was still living at my parents' house and making money from skating. I started recording songs, but not calling it FYP. This was probably about '87/'88 and our first live show was in '91 or '92, at least four years [later]. The *Extra Credit* 7 inch and the *Made in USA* 7 inch were both released without us every playing a live show. I did all the instruments on those and two demo tapes. That was the only reason I got a four-track, was to do demo tapes. That was when people still did demo tapes. That was like an official release. ¶ [My girlfriend] asked me to put on *Extra Credit* the other night because she had never heard it. People always come up to me and say they heard it was a drum machine. It took me 17, 18 years to realize they weren't saying it sounds like real drums; they were saying it sounds like a real shitty drummer. They were making fun of me instead of complimenting the drum sounds.

Were you into it at the time?

I don't know. I don't think I was. I remember bringing it to Zed Records and the first

thing they did was put it on and I remember my first reaction was to look who was in the store like, "No, don't put it on," like I was embarrassed. Right when he put it on he said, "Whoah, this is really raw," and I remember taking that as a compliment, but, again, it probably wasn't.

So you didn't know how to play when you recorded that stuff?

Um, not really. My friend Andy Harris had a mini-guitar and I borrowed it. I didn't know chords and I was putting my thumb over the top two strings and I tuned it until it sounded like Agnostic Front, like "Victim in Pain." It was like 7 Seconds and the Germs. 7 Seconds I could relate to as far as you can't hear the drums, you hear guitar and you hear vocals. I just learned letters to chords in the last few years. It wasn't like I wanted to be a musician at all; I hated musicians. I just wanted a piece of vinyl to show to my grandkids.

How did Recess grow from the *Extra Credit* 7 inch?

The FYP records did good, but I didn't know what was good then. There was so much built up from me going out and selling the demos, the skating thing and it was in skate videos.

Is that how it sold, the skater connection?

That was how the demo tape sold. There was a little bit of that, but I don't know how much. I didn't do my market research back then.

At what point did you realize you could keep putting out other bands?

Garden Weasel were the ones because it was such as good experience. The guys were really nice. They weren't dicks or typical musicians. Starting in the '90s, you started meeting these guys who didn't belong. I hate saying that because I've never been elitist like that, but there are some people who want to make it and some who need to play. Those guys were super down-to-earth skater dudes, played parties, smoked weed, and lived to tell about it.

Weren't you straight edge for a long time?

All the way until I was 22. I always called myself straight, not straight edge. It was coincidence I went to straight edge shows and truthfully, some of that made me want to try drinking because I might as well had played on the football team. It was that same mentality but with music.

How did you start playing guitar in FYP?

I set up shows and one of them was with

Born Against. Jed got so drunk he forgot how to play and I grabbed the guitar from him. I never tried singing and playing before then. It was not planned at all. If I think about just singing now, I feel so cheesy. I did it on tour with the Queers. They invited me up and I felt weird. I like playing guitar now. I have more fun playing guitar than singing.

I heard a rumor that you toured in a Honda Civic and lied when you got to shows. You'd tell people your van broke down and you had no equipment.

That's probably a true story. I don't remember saying that but I would not deny it.

Was it difficult every time the lineup changed?

A lot of times people were in it just for one tour. They wanted to do it to say they were in FYP because they heard about the stories of playing live. There were some that would quit on tour and I'd get back, find somebody else, set up a show, put up fliers and they would see the fliers and say they didn't know we were playing. I was like, 'because you quit on tour' and they'd say they were joking. I never really kicked anybody out. If you don't want to be here, don't be here. I never persuaded anybody to stay either. I didn't want people to do something they were sacrificing their lives for. I wanted to get up, play and feel rad about it.

When did you start to take it more seriously?

Probably not until the late years. Maybe after we did the poppy records. People thought we were selling out.

You guys got a lot of shit for the poppy records.

You listen to the Ramones and the Beatles and you know . . . it was natural.

Did the poppier stuff bring in a new crowd?

It seemed like it got a little bit bigger, but if we did *Dance My Dunce 2*, it would have been way bigger. I know that for a fact. When we were doing tours for *Toilet Kids Bread* and *My Man Grumpy*, those were the biggest tours. I never expected to play to more than 30 people—ever.

Did you ever feel like you should have changed the name when you started doing the poppier records?

No, that's why we did *Toys That Kill*. It was a fresh start. The first tours we did with

FYP were the funnest, so I was like, 'If we do that, we could get rid of all this "play this song, play that song" and have some fun tours.'

I've heard people say FYP ended when Joe died.

Yeah, pretty much. FYP existed long before he joined the band, but when he joined he brought this energy and excitement that could never be rekindled without him. We gave it a shot but it just didn't work.

What do you think of the FYP Toys That Kill record?

I wish we didn't do it. I wish I didn't spend that much money on it. I got way out of hand and beyond my control. I had \$5,000 set out; it turned into \$15,000. I still have a debt from that. It was stupid. Everything went wrong. We had demos of that and I could have released that and all this would have been cool. At the time, FYP had enough selling power to do a record like that, not tour on it and make its money back. But, I had a distributor at the time and for some reason, they didn't like the cover of it. We get their Friday fax out, and we were their only exclusive label, and it wasn't even on it at all. They were our only distributor, so no one was buying this record. It turned into this big thing and we had to change distributors during that release. By the time we got settled, it was an old release. I like the record, I'm glad it's out and glad we have it, but it's such a cursed release from the get-go. There was no reason to re-record those songs. We wanted to give some little last hurrah and that's not always a good idea. I've had a lot of bad ideas and that was one of them.

Where does The Underground Railroad to Candyland fit in?

Once Chachi decided to do the longshoring

thing, I started tinkering with doing something new. I get stressed out because this is what I do. I'm not looking to do anything else. But I live off it. I do Recess and those guys need to get some sort of career thing going.

What do you look for when putting records out?

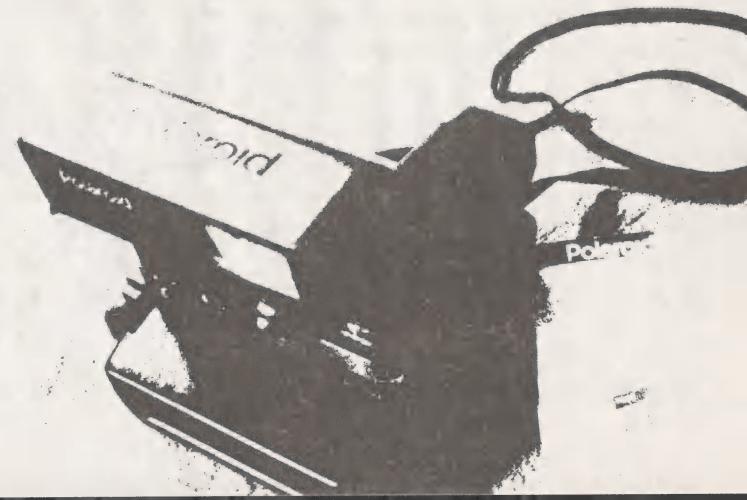
Anything I like by people I like. I'm doing releases upcoming that aren't going to fit into the Recess style at all, but I like it. I'm doing a 12-inch with *Dios Malos*. People will probably get mad at me for putting it out. I don't ever want to put out something only because it fits with what I put out. I have all this stuff I want to re-release and repress, but I don't think I'll ever get around to doing it because I keep saying after I get all this new stuff out, but other new stuff piles on it.

Do you prefer to be known as a musician or for Recess?

Maybe band stuff because you're actually making songs. You want people to recognize the songs, but you also want to recognize the bands you like.

Have you ever thought about signing to another label?

I'm not going to say that I'm always going to put out my own records, but it's easy and comfortable that way. I'd rather have it like that. We've have friends put out EPs, but I've never thought about it seriously. We've never got a serious offer, either. I don't ever want to do that. If I could go my whole life without doing that, then I would feel a lot better about myself. I definitely need money, but I don't want to do something I don't want to do for money. Making a record for people who don't give a shit about what you're doing—I just don't want to enter a world like that. ☺



t's been nearly three years since their debut record, *La Maison de Mon Rêve*, was released on Touch and Go. Now, CocoRosie has released their third record, *The Adventures of Ghosthorse and Stillborn*, and is anticipating a full tour of Europe where they will return to Paris, their land of initial inspiration.

Paris was the city where, as sisters separated at a young age, and plagued by adolescent argument and childhood rivalry, found themselves sharing a small apartment in their early 20s where they reunited in good faith. This was the birth of CocoRosie—a birth that led to experimentation, collaborations, friendships, and an intense bond between sisters that could never be broken or severed. Together, Bianca and Sierra Casady blend folk, hip-hop, and classical opera into their own mix of lo-fi beauty. Their unique use of harps, beatboxing, and children's toys create heartbreakingly melodic and catchy rhythms while the sisters' inimitable voices provide the delicate splendor. Often, CocoRosie is lumped in with the "freak folk" movement because of their sound and strong friendships with Devendra Banhart and Antony, but they stand out on their own—something in between hip-hop and children's music.

There is a clear magic in the music and life of CocoRosie that reveals itself on *La Maison de Mon Rêve* and *Noah's Ark*, but comes to fruition on *The Adventures of Ghosthorse and Stillborn*. These are not two ordinary sisters, and CocoRosie is certainly no ordinary band. The music is creepy and dark, but cute and danceable, and the records act almost as an epic twisted childhood dream, a description that can apply both to their bizarre album artwork and to the music itself.

I got a chance to meet with the Casadys (and their mom) in the trendy neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and listened as they spoke about spirituality, hip-hop, and everything in between—while their mom sat on a couch doing their tax returns.

Interview by **Mike Barron**

Photos by **Julia Gillard**

You recently played a show at Carnegie Hall that David Byrne hosted. Tell me a little bit about that.

Sierra: It was a really cool experience. It was a blast from the past with Vashti [Bunyan], who is a really dear friend of ours. So that was definitely one of the highlights for me, just playing with her again. Just being on that stage, there was a really crazy spirit about it.

I had a personal affiliation with the whole concept of being there because I studied classical music when I was younger. So singing at Carnegie Hall was kind of a dream for me. That's where I was coming from, and the night in general was pretty magical.

Bianca: Yeah, and we're good friends with Devendra [Banhart] as well, and it was a nice eclipse for us to play with a few people who we have played with over the years, all kind of in different places in our musical path, and to eclipse that place was a marking moment in everyone's orbit.

Do you see yourself fitting into a legacy of music that David Byrne helped create?

Sierra: Possibly, unbeknownst to us, but we have remained and continue to exist in our own bubble, and really creating from our own ghosts and from a very personal place. Sometimes the affiliation with other groups, the folk movement and stuff, has rung true to us, but, honestly, not in a very concrete way. We've pretty much been on our own trip, and we've been happy and kind of excited in the moments when we've been included in circles. But we've been pretty much absorbed in our own imaginations and infatuated with each other, and pretty seduced into our solitary world.

The whole avant-garde folk, or "freak-folk" scene as some call it, has gotten quite a bit of publicity, lately with Devendra Banhart, Joanna Newsom, Antony and the Johnsons, etc. Do you fit into that movement in any way, or are you off doing your own thing?

Sierra: Well, we did meet Antony through music. We saw him in concert and pretty quickly became more or less best friends. There are some fine lines involved, it's hard to say. We haven't *really* ever felt connected to those new concepts that the press have created. I mean, there's definitely, for us, a pretty insane spiritual bond we have—for example with Antony. And that we've had as well with Devendra and Vashti.

Is there an aspect to this music that is responsible for it getting over-hyped in the press?

Bianca: We're really unaware of where we sit in a musical history context. So from the outside looking in, and looking at musical history, maybe we are more of a part of something than we're aware. I wouldn't consider

Antony folk music. I think we're a bunch of artists where vocals are the primary forefront of all of our music. And there's a lot of spirituality in the writing.

Sierra: What struck me as interesting, at times, in thinking about how people have responded, is that maybe this whole movement and this whole grouping and these titles are not necessarily an effect of what's happening with the artists, but maybe with audience and the communities around us and society or the young people right now. Maybe they're calling out for this movement. Maybe they're just genuinely exploring a very natural urge, or what could be connected to folk music, like something very natural. Maybe inside there is a calling for something that is very anti-technology. And that's natural again, or very rootsy. Maybe even a spiritual thing. That's something that all these artists share, and that we feel like we share. Spirituality.

How does spirituality operate in your music?

Sierra: Well, in the past year, we've been working with ghosts and spirits just as being a big part of the inspiration, especially for lyrics. And most of the time, our work is intuitive.

You mentioned the audience craving freak-folk, but I feel like your appeal and audience is hard to nail down. While you certainly embrace your femininity, there is definitely another side, one in which women have mustaches and unicorns fuck each other and puke rainbow tears. Is any part of a goal appeal to wider audiences, or has this occurred naturally?

Bianca: There's definitely no goal, and our creative driving place is in the epics of the crossover. It's not one crossover, but many crossings-over—mythology and era and culture and religion and gender. So it's sort of a rudimentary recipe to not just our work, but our whole lifestyle.

What determines your audience? I've heard from complete jocks who love your music, and I've heard from the most tight-pants wearing hipsters who also like it, and remixers.

Sierra: We don't think about this stuff that much. We really are just on the other side and we just stay put there. But I remember when we really first came out . . . we didn't come out with some big splash . . . we just were kinda playing two songs at a friend's birthday and



Qoco Rosie

then we played one other show, and we weren't sure why. We hadn't really formed a band, we were just kind of poking around. Our whole initial audience was punk rock. Like, really the dark punk side. Right?

Bianca: Yeah, dudes. The hardcore dudes.

Sierra: They just thought we were *really* hardcore and it was really serious.

Bianca: We know we have a lot of children fans, which, I think, makes us pretty happy. If considering the audience at all, we like the idea of an all-ages kind of thing. All ages is cool.

When signing with Touch and Go, did this come to your mind at all? It used to be a punk rock label, but now its sort of opened up with bands like TV on the radio, Nina Nastasia, !!!.

Bianca: It just happened . . . it just happened all at once sort of. We didn't realize what contacts we were stepping into either at all. We had never even heard of it or hardly anyone on the catalog.

Sierra, what was your music like before CoCoRosie, when you were on your own?

Sierra: I had always been kind of writing music more or less in my imagination. I kind of had a very deep self-hatred that I was really active in, and I wasn't into things that were natural. I was into things that were artificial and the romance of that, and being in opera, if you can imagine, is not such a natural thing in a way. It's very forced and very refined and very, very technical. And that was my obsession, and I never realized that I could turn to something that was really natural for me, and find love there.

Did the discipline of opera help create what you're doing in CoCoRosie?

Sierra: It's completely the opposite, actually. But somehow, and I don't have many words to describe it, yes it has shaped it, but in some very twisted way. Because it's exactly the opposite, but it inspires me deeply. So for a while I was experiencing this kind of rebellion in a way, and there was a drive—it fed me.

Opera is meant to be experienced live, but CoCoRosie captures very basement-esque sounds. Were you just rebelling against opera when you started experimenting on tape recorders?

Bianca: I don't think we really thought about

things in that way. We were more caught up in trying to translate the poetry of our music, and using those sort of recording processes supported a more cinematic . . . We're more capturing opera in that way.

So how exactly did you all start playing music?

Sierra: It probably started with a boombox out on the athletic field in our neighborhood. There was a big track near our small apartment in Paris. We would take our boombox out there with Wu-Tang on it. Just this little junky boombox, and we'd jog with the boombox. And we just kind of started freestyling right over the Wu-Tang.

There's definitely a big hip-hop feel to the records.

Sierra: Really, at the point when we began playing together, we were listening to classical music and Wu-Tang pretty much.

Bianca: I think hip-hop is our main contemporary.

What exactly do you take from hip-hop?

Bianca: I think Sierra in particular, in terms of music, has a sensibility that is very akin to hip-hop, in terms of hooks and simple but heartbreaking hooks and melodies. And me, being very much of a writer and connecting to poetry a lot, I think makes sense in terms of hip-hop and the storytelling aspect of it. I think making something that is danceable that is still very heavy and very personal, as opposed to maybe some kind of pop music. It's like dark and gritty. A lot of things are just eclipses and fate. One of the only people that we met in Paris during that time was a beatboxer. And we just kind of tied him up and started doing work with him. Putting him to do beats. And there's this really organic connection with us and him—his name is Spleen. He's been touring with us pretty much the whole time, and he's on all the records. And we have another beatboxer named Ted, and he's also from Paris. I think we're attracted to that human side of beats and hip-hop.

How do you guys find touring as opposed to making records?

Sierra: Very different . . . Almost really accesses the opposite creative side.

Bianca: But, when we're creating our set, we're kind of creating a record, you know? Its sort of picking from each record and playing



*We were listening
to classical
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Wu-Tang
pretty much.*

new things and maybe trying things out that will never be on a record, but will have a place in the live situation. And we do projections, and they're all very tied into each other, so the visual aspect of it makes it a little bit more active. And we get down sometimes. We dance. [Laughs.] But every tour is really different in terms of that.

Sierra: Our recording process, not solely, but a lot of the time is improvisational. And for us, it's a really important element of recording, and it's one of our major roles to actually capture living moments, not something rehearsed and contrived, but capturing an actual event. And then onstage it's totally different. Whereas a lot of bands take that moment to be very improvisational, we actually go into a more meditative trance kind of thing, and have a lot of our stuff pre-rehearsed so we just go into a Mantra onstage.

Bianca: We kind of create a little movie. We know exactly where to go and what to do. Maybe the movie will slowly mark over the tour, but it's more tour to tour. And reinventing ourselves is definitely important for our hearts to really be in it. So each tour is kind of its own movie, I think. ☺

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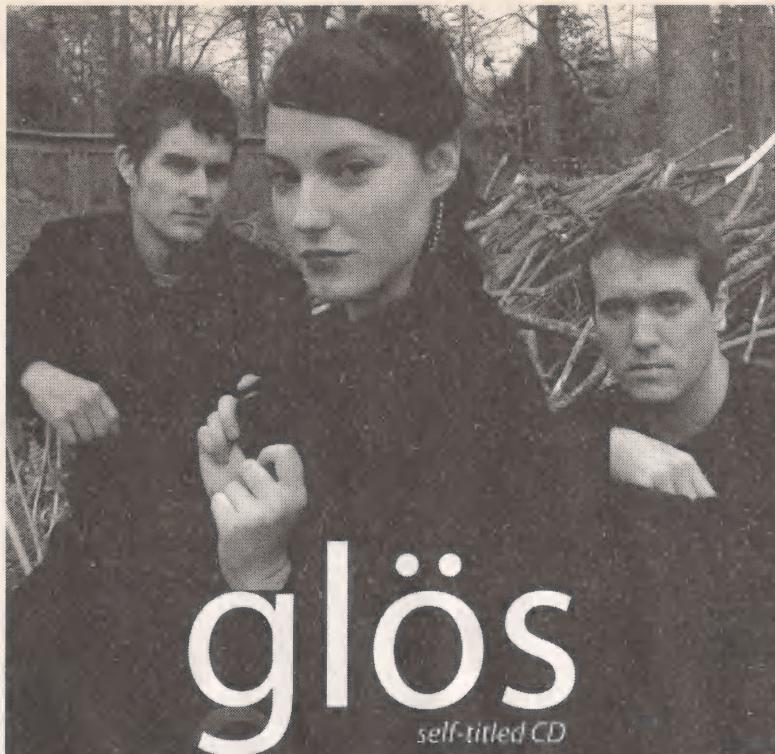
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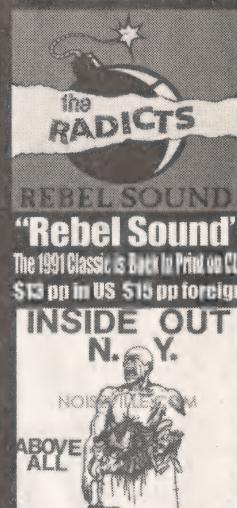
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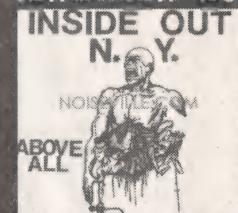
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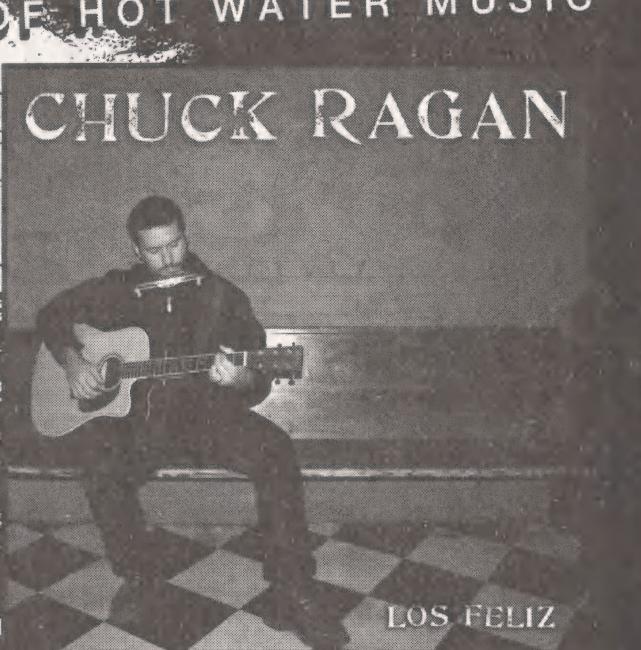
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The Kids Will Have Their Say

by Michael H Carriere

The Rebirth of Students for a Democratic Society

For a group that has lain dormant for close to 40 years, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) is looking spry these days. SDS—the group that came to personify student protest on college campuses throughout the 1960s—is back, resurrected in January 2006 by former members of the once-powerful organization and seniors of Connecticut's Stonington High School. As of early 2007, SDS includes over 200 chapters from across the country, while older activists, including many '60s veterans such as Al Haber (SDS's first president), Carl Davidson, and Bernadine Dohrn, have shown their support by joining SDS's sister organization, Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS). The group is now, in the words of SDS veteran Robert Ross, "undertaking enormous projects," including a fight for free speech at Pace University (where five members were arrested for distributing political flyers in November 2006), blocking military convoys in Olympia, Washington, and taking part in mass demonstrations against the Iraq War in Washington, DC, New York City, and other locations. "The level of activity," Ross concludes, "is stunning."

Despite the activity, little attention has been paid the new SDS, yet the rebirth of a group that many gave up for dead following a riotous national conference in 1969 deserves closer attention. I spoke with SDS members across the United States about their activism and the legacy of their organization. This is not, however, a comprehensive study of the organization or the movement; instead, it's a snapshot of an organization-in-movement.

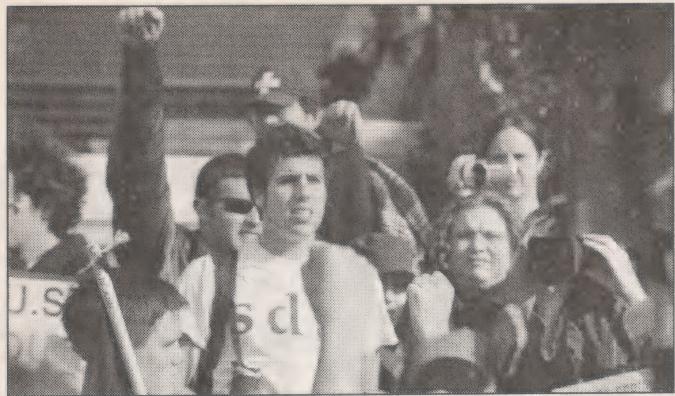
At the heart of this snapshot lies the history of the original SDS. Founded in 1960 by a small band of students at the University of Michigan, within a few years SDS had become the seminal organization of the American New Left. The group's 1962 *Port Huron Statement*, with its focus on such

concepts as alienation and authenticity within American political culture, helped articulate the early concerns of SDS and pushed the group toward a belief in the liberating potential of "participatory democracy" and the hope that social change could be affected on the local level. In practice, this took the form of projects like the Economic Research and Action Project, begun in 1964, in which SDSers lived among the poor in such cities as Chicago and Newark, New Jersey. By the late 1960s, racial unrest in many American cities, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and the birth of the counterculture all played a role in attracting new members to the organization. Such growth may have led to the group's demise, as SDS proved incapable of effectively assimilating all of the ideologies, personalities, and conflicts that came with such expansion.

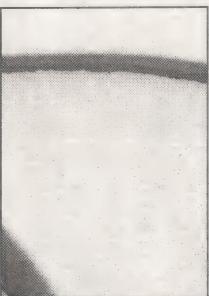
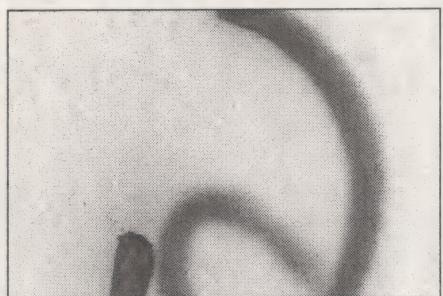
By 1969, rampant sectarianism had beset the organization, and warring factions fought for control of the group. Out of this chaotic atmosphere, the Weather Underground emerged, preaching solidarity with global revolutionary movements and advocating armed resistance. After efforts like the October 1969 Days of Rage riots—when Weather members damaged property and battled police officers in the streets of Chicago—the group literally imploded. In March 1970, while preparing a bomb meant for a military complex in New Jersey, three Weather Underground members died in a Greenwich Village townhouse when the explosives detonated prematurely. It was a tragic end to the possibilities of the 1960s, and ensured that SDS would be remembered as a group of home-grown terrorists.

The reincarnation of SDS by Pat Korte, Thomas Good, and Alan Haber started in late 2005, when Korte—then a high-school senior in Connecticut—came across a posting from Good, a 47 year-old anarchist and database programmer in New York City, on a University of Michigan message board. Korte contacted Good (now a key member of MDS), who put the aspiring activist in touch with Alan Haber. Sensing the need for an intergenerational protest movement, Korte, Haber, and other allies issued a January 2006 call for a national revival of the organization and held the first national convention in August 2006. To Korte, now a student at Eugene Lang College, the name, as he told Counterpunch's Ron Jacobs, "accurately describes us (we are students for a democratic society), the ideas expressed in the *Port Huron Statement*, the focus on participatory democracy, and the militancy and radicalism that defined the original SDS are much needed in the 21st century."





Punk rock has played an even larger role in the personal and political development of today's SDS members. Much as the work of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and other Beat poets did in the late 1950s, punk appears to be a cultural avenue into the world of political activism.



Since January 2006, the group has grown at a rapid pace, mostly due to the organization's use of technology. Mary Sackley, an SDS member at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Ore., finds that the Internet helped when, for example, "moments after SDS was re-founded last year, [the news] could have been seen in people's e-mail boxes across the world." Or, as Alan Haber colorfully puts it, "the Internet helps spread the idea, like a healthful virus." Such technologies are the most important ways the new SDS is disseminating its ideas.

Yet technology does not explain why this particular moment is ripe for an activist revival. To many SDS members, both old and new, the Iraq War specifically—and American foreign policy generally—are at the root of the popularity of the revived organization. "People are waking up," according to Haber, "and are sick of the lying, killing government and want a different world." Rank-and-file members of SDS agree. Mary Sackley says, "the war effects virtually everyone's lives indirectly or directly, and I think it has played a huge role in radicalizing the views of young people." As the conflict in Vietnam radicalized a generation in the 1960s, it appears that America's policies in the Mideast may be having a similar effect on the students of the 21st century.

The latest incarnation of SDS has taken a tremendous risk in reviving such a controversial name. Today's members take these concerns to heart, and remain fully aware of both the positive and negative aspects of the group's history. They see many similarities between this era and the age of the original SDS, but perhaps more importantly, wish to be a part of the great tradition of American radicalism. Such continuity has proven remarkably appealing to the original members of the organization, many of whom felt disconnected from such traditions when they initially formed the group. To members of the old guard, this current historical moment holds a promise of redemption, a sense that the standard narrative of SDS can be revised, or even rewritten. At the moment, however, this intergenerational dynamic has reinvigorated both camps, giving SDS the potential to become—once again—the central organization for student protest in the United States.

THE ROOTS OF SDS ACTIVISM

It is clear that this historical moment has helped lay the groundwork for the growth of SDS, but what of the activists themselves? For many, coming of age in the affluent 1990s has dramatically affected their personal and political development, giving them a refreshing sense of hope and optimism. At the same time, the realization that not everyone shared in the affluence became a crucial first moment in the evolution of their political consciousness. As University of Chicago SDS member Patrick Dunn explains:

I think for most people, the political impulse arises out of a kind of alienation they experience at a very basic existential level. They see people suffering around them in the world. They see inequality. They see conditions that shouldn't exist. And there comes a point when they refuse to tolerate it.

In a sense, Dunn is referring to the same "Other America"—previously brought to light by author Michael Harrington in 1962—that initially moved many of the original SDSers to understand that poverty was a crucial issue in post-World War II American society. Without the benefit of a seminal tract like Harrington's, today's SDS members have come to this realization

through a multitude of experiences, including global travel, urban discovery (the story of the young suburban adolescent taking the train into the city is archetypal), and, perhaps most interestingly, the growth of punk rock.

To Dawson Barrett, an SDS member at UW-Milwaukee, "touring with hardcore punk bands" exposed him to the cold realities of urban life in many pockets of America, locations where punk rock venues are often found. Yet it appears that punk rock has played an even larger role in the personal and political development of today's SDS members. Much as the work of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and other Beat poets did in the late 1950s, punk appears to be a cultural avenue into the world of political activism. Dawson credits punk for not only showing him sides of urban life that many of us do not see on a day-to-day basis, but also for introducing him to a variety of people, books, and ideas that have helped shape his political consciousness. And he is not alone. Senia Barragan, an SDS organizer at Brown University (and a singer in the punk band Set of Red Things) says that punk acts like Dead Kennedys and Minor Threat first piqued her interest in politics. "There used to be days when I'd cut school and just listen to my Minor Threat tape over and over again," she says. "They really made me think about what it meant to be different, to be radical, in an artistic medium."

Kevin Gilmartin, an SDS member at SUNY Purchase College, tells a similar story: "I probably got into politics in some way through art/music/literature . . . I listened to bands like Sleater-Kinney and the Clash." The phenomenon seems so widespread that even the old guard—individuals like Paul Buhle and Bob Ross with little or no experience with this genre of music—has noticed the connection between punk and the latest round of SDS members.

To many of these activists, punk has served as a crucial first step in the formation of their identity. For example, growing up in the suburbs of Connecticut, Josh Russell, a recent Brandeis graduate living in the Bay Area and working with SDS chapters across the country, found "no framework of way to understand that contradiction" he felt between himself and those around him. Finding punk allowed him to separate himself from what he most despised about suburbia, through a type of music "that had politics at its center." Yet he is quick to point out that as his thoughts on activism have evolved, he has come to see "a lot of limitations" in the punk rock scene. He finds "being trapped in a subcultural context makes it difficult to relate to other people"—a shortcoming when one is attempting to build a broad-based mass movement. To Russell, punk rock is good for "declaring your difference," but not good for forging common ground with much of the population.

FROM THE MIDDLE CLASS AND BEYOND?

Like earlier student activists, most members of the new SDS are white males, from middle to upper-middle class families, attending private universities such as Harvard, Columbia, Brown, and Haverford. In the late 1960s, psychologist Kenneth Keniston, in such works as *Youth and Dissent* and *Young Radicals*, found that many student radicals were white and came from middle to upper-middle class families (and often attended elite private schools). Keniston sought to understand how the home life of youth may have played a role in their political development. He found that those students who joined groups like SDS were often acting upon values they

had learned from their parents. Those parents within higher income brackets tended to be more politically engaged, and tended to stress the importance of racial equality, empathy with the poor, and critical thinking. The road to activism, Keniston concluded, often started at home.

Yet, contrary to what Keniston found in the 1960s, early life within the households of today's SDS members was not very political. Patrick Dunn, a graduate student in philosophy (like the earlier incarnation of the group, the majority of SDSers come from the humanities and social sciences), describes growing up in a "relatively privileged neighborhood . . . in a typical suburban home, 25 miles outside of the city, not much contact with poverty or with urban life in general. Insular, cloistered, highly controlled. Highly homogeneous, racially and culturally." His political education, however, was not fostered in this environment. "My parents are not political people in any robust sense," he says. Spencer Chumbley, an SDS member and undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, agrees, claiming that his parents "aren't political at all."

If such middle to upper-class parents did prescribe to a political philosophy, it could best be described as the third-way, moderate Democratic Party politics commonly associated with Bill Clinton and his allies. Interestingly, a number of current SDS members initially shared such beliefs. Growing up in the suburbs, Nick Kreitman, a member of Chicago SDS and undergraduate at Elmhurst College in Illinois, remembers that he "adopted the consciousness of the middle class. I was firmly a Clinton Democrat who loved 'Equality' and believed that effective political management from the middle class would solve the world's problems."

Even current SDS members who come from working-class homes note that their parents were not engaged political actors. In fact, these households tended to be more conservative than their middle and upper-middle class counterparts. Andrew Whitaker, an SDS member at the University of Mississippi, recalls that his working-class parents were "fairly conservative and never really discussed politics with him. Senia Barragan, an SDS organizer at Brown University, remembers that her parents "were by no means politically active . . . My father and mother come from the 'American Dream' way of life where the conclusion is the nice house, fancy car, etcetera." The "red-diaper baby" phenomenon of the 1960s—in which student activists of that decade traced the beginning of their political development to the influence of their left-leaning parents—is absent from this generation.

THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

More than anything, the international arena seems to have most shaped this generation of SDS members. This is not a necessarily new: previous SDSers came to radicalism after the experiences of the Cold War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the stifling climate of anti-communism. Yet one is struck by the intensity with which the new breed of SDS member feels—and articulates—her or his political ideals. At the core of such feeling is undoubtedly the events surrounding September 11, 2001. Many current SDS members were still in high school when the Twin Towers fell, and this event has played a major part in their development as political beings (more so than any commentators or scholars have begun to under-

stand). At perhaps the most basic level, the attacks of September 11 have come to serve as an obvious symbol of the end of late twentieth-century peace and prosperity. "Growing up in the '90s and early 2000s," explains Spencer Chumbley, "it was pretty peaceful." To Spencer, September 11 thus stands as "a watershed event," an occurrence that has literally changed the development of history. It was an "awareness-provoking moment," notes Andrew Whitaker. And even if the first response was unquestioning support for the United States and its policies (an admitted initial response for many SDS members), September 11 effectively shattered the optimism that had marked the previous decade.

Their attention captured, the college kids that gravitated toward SDS became actively interested in learning as much as they could about the conditions that may have led up to September 11, as well as trying to stay as informed as possible on the aftermath of these attacks. UW-Milwaukee SDS member J Burseth finds that the attacks "really sparked something. Since then, a lot of us have been more conscious about everything." Brian Averill, fellow Milwaukee SDS member notes: "From that point on, I started reading the news everyday." Such a process led to the development of a critical mindset, and students began to see how September 11 was being manipulated—how the government was using it to push its agenda. Paul Buhle believes that many youth are beginning to comprehend "the terror of a big state closing in on our private lives," the same fear that motivated him and other original SDSers in the 1960s. The players, however, are different. Michael Harman, an SDS member at Eastern New Mexico University, notes how Americans are now "being bombarded with anti-Muslim propaganda, the same way our parents were with anti-communist propaganda."

"THE IRAQ WAR IS WHAT REALLY RADICALIZED US"

Doubtless, the Iraq War is truly the driving force behind the new breed of SDS. On a general level, the war has proved a spur for the movement. "The Iraq War is what radicalized us," proclaims Andrew Whitaker. Indeed, the war has given some their first place to engage in mass political protest. "I was pretty much apathetic toward politics for my whole life," notes Burseth, "and then the war happened and I realized, that shit's not good and I should probably try to do something about it." According to Nick Kreitman, "It wasn't until the buildup to the Iraq War that my opinions toward politics took shape. My thoughts about the benevolence of America melted as I saw how much opposition there was to the Bush administration's bald-faced lies to drag America into war."

All of the students that I spoke with commented on the importance of the Iraq War in shaping their activist ideas. It is not surprising that SDS has made the war a target for mass demonstrations and actions. One detects an almost visceral response to the duplicity of the Bush administration in these students, a sense that their faith in the integrity of government has been forever shattered. The parallels between the current moment and the events of the 1960s, when the Vietnam War altered the way that generation viewed their elected officials, are obvious. Paul Buhle, writing in the web version of the SDS publication *New Left Notes*, asks "So, why now? The reasons should be pretty obvious. The empire has overextended itself again . . . The imperial crisis is escalating, without any sign of resolution." The disgust that today's

students are articulating about Bush's war policies is beginning to look a whole lot like the anger original SDSers felt toward the Johnson administration. Or, as Buhle stated: "You had Vietnam, now we have Iraq."

POLEMICAL, BUT PRACTICAL

Today's generation of student radicals differentiates itself from many early SDSers, who were strongly drawn to the work of C Wright Mills, Andre Gorz, and other theoretical scholars, with a political engagement rooted in event and experience. The new breed is drawn to the polemical, impassioned works of individuals such as Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky. Senia Barragan cites Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* as her "historical bible." After reading it junior year of high school, she urged the history department to assign the book for all history classes, alongside the standard history textbook. "I mean I knew the US was shady—imperialism, colonialism and what not—but that book really did it for me," she explains.

Yet the new SDS is less engaged in philosophy. According to Barragan, "we try not to get too caught up in theoretical debates, although we have, and this is sometimes healthy, but when it eats a group alive, then you know something is wrong."

Older SDS members have noticed, and chastised the group for their abhorrence of intellectual frameworks. (Bob Ross disappointingly notes that "A certain level of conceptualization is just not there yet.") Others, however, have applauded the group for not going down that road. To the new cohort of SDS members, Mark Rudd explains, "Theory seems to be less important. They've learned from the end of SDS that debating ideas is merely an ego trip. Yes, there seems to be much more pragmatism, which I find refreshing."

The often violent arguments that marked the later years of the original incarnation of SDS have yet to resurface. Debates focus less on internal matters (how to provide substantial intellectual footing for one's actions, developing a cohesive theory of activism), and more on external concerns (how best to reach those currently not a part of SDS).

This has led to a less confrontational, more educational, mode of engagement. SDS members in Rhode Island and Mississippi distribute information on the Iraq War, both to students at their schools as well as to members of their surrounding communities. Chicago SDS has begun holding teach-ins on the war effort, and has started the Iraq Research Project—an endeavor that attempts to compile information, in both print and online formats, on the Iraq War. According to Chicago SDS:

Presentations and teach-ins are the most critical elements of the anti-war movement. Holding these teach-ins and presentations will be a crucial route towards building a sustainable community based opposition to the Iraq war. Our person to person contacts through our presentations will be our most valuable assets.

This is not to say that direct action has no place in the new SDS. In fact, the national organization co-sponsored a March 2006 march in New York City against the Iraq War. Yet to many SDS members, there is a sense that some form of consensus is needed while attempting to grow a mass political movement.

The new SDS is careful to avoid the road of rampant sectarianism that seemingly led to violent tactics and the breakup of the original SDS caused by the splintering off of the Weather Under-

ground. Interestingly, many SDS members told me that their dis-
taste for the Weather Underground was not due to a deep-seated
hatred of the tactics (some, of course, displayed disgust at violence,
while a few current SDS members saw how such tactics could be ef-
fective), but rather because such tactics didn't seem practical. "No-
body in SDS is talking about employing the tactics that Weather
did, regardless of whether or not they agree with them" Josh Rus-
sell notes emphatically. "We live in a different time than our pre-
decessors did." To some SDS members, the basic difference is a
sense of what might be achievable. As Patrick Dunn explains:

The Weather Underground was very serious, but very naïve at the same time. I think their advocacy of revolution was premature and ill-conceived . . . They weren't sober of what they were capable of. I think those are the main things we want to avoid. I don't think today's SDS has any real illusions about taking over, but I think it can be even more effective because of its awareness of what it's capable of, of its modesty regarding its capacity.

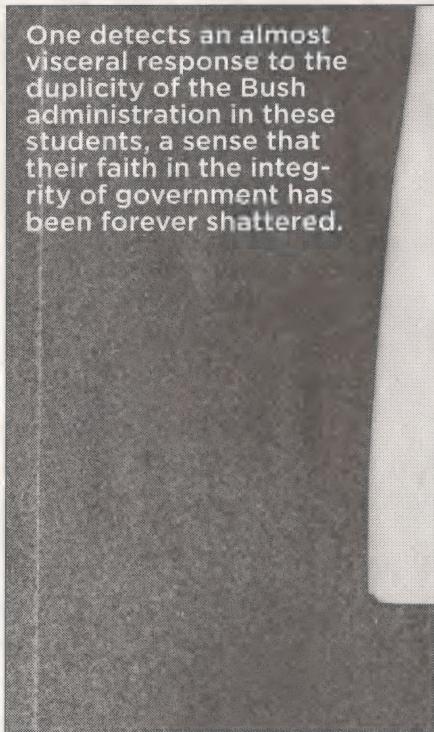
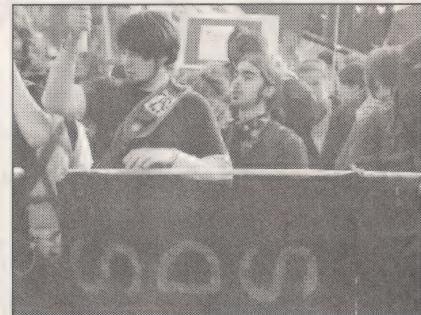
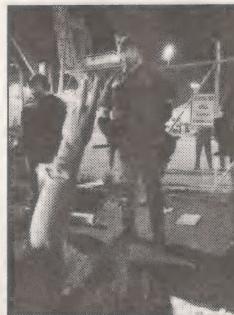
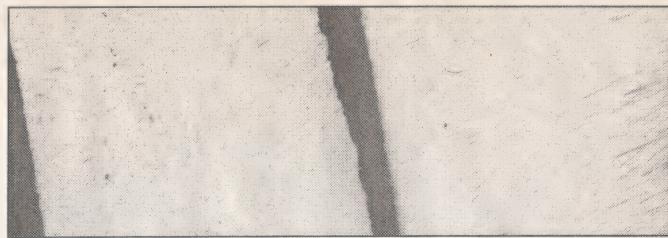
A similar sentiment is voiced by Dawson Barrett who, commenting on the Weather Underground, argues that "Regardless of the ethics, it failed, and failed miserably, and alienated a lot of people."

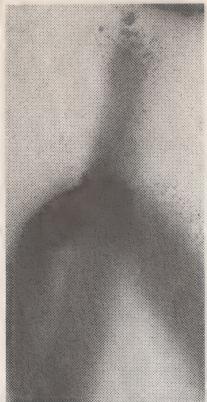
Many find greater inspiration in the early days: the Port Huron Statement and the idea of an inclusive, non-violent radicalism. Many current SDS members still consider the Port Huron Statement both timely and relevant. The document, with its themes of alienation, authenticity, anti-war, and need for true democracy, still speaks to young people. "If you read it," notes J Burseth, "it could have been written last week." At the same time, the group seems to be following the advice of Bob Ross, who has called upon new SDS members to look to the organizations' first five years, when the group was working towards a broad-based radicalism, one not afraid to reach out and make alliances. Russell notes that SDS has struck up partnerships with groups like Rainforest Action Network, a group that may not share all of SDS's views and goals. To Mark Rudd, the current group of activists is "taking the best of the various eras of the old SDS—the commitment to organizing and education of the early days wedded to the militancy and anti-imperialism of the later SDS. And they're trying to avoid the pitfalls of both."

"I THINK WE KNOW OUR HISTORY PRETTY WELL"

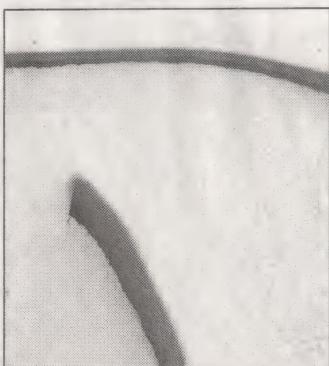
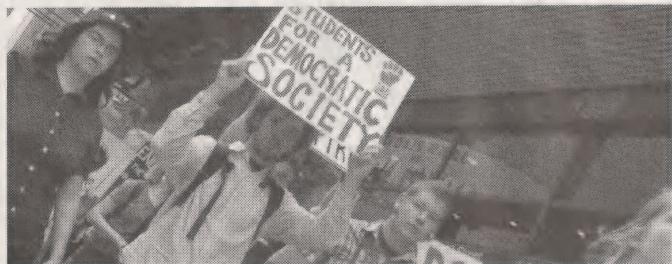
Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the new SDS is just how well they do know the narrative of their predecessors. "I think we know our history pretty well," comments Dawson Barrett, and many members have made it known that they are familiar with both the successes of the original SDS and the failures ("SDS broke up in 1969 because it had strayed away from its values and its membership," explains Nick Kreitman. "The 1969 convention was not a meeting of national branches but a political struggle for the leadership circle by various factions"). Even such original SDS members as Mark Rudd are impressed by the group's collective understanding of previous events. "Some of them know more than I do, or at least what I remember," offers Rudd, only half kidding.

This thorough understanding of the group's history is what led today's SDS to revive that troubled name—a decision they knew came with much baggage. Not surprisingly, a number of the first-generation SDS members were ambivalent to the resurrection of the name—or even downright hostile. Mark Rudd admits that "My first reaction was negative, that there were too many historical neg-





To some in the older generation, the new SDS may provide for opportunities to clear up perceived misconceptions of the original group, and highlight that their legacy did not end with the implosion of the organization in 1969.



atives to cart around." Yet it was precisely the history of the original SDS that has attracted many youth to the revised version of the group—and the fact that this history clearly differentiated it from other organizations in today's rather tepid leftist political climate. Michael Harman eloquently explains this position:

I choose SDS because it does have the strongest history, and had the chance to really become a radical voice in an anti-war/progressive community that is dominated by the likes of UFPJ (United for Peace and Justice) and other groups that have been co-opted by the Democratic Party into fighting for corporate candidates, as long as those candidates are not Bush. I feel that this is symptomatic of the problem with radicals today—they are willing to settle for a lesser evil, in the hope that by doing so the general evil will lessen. I joined SDS hoping to provide a different truth. SDS was one of the fire starters of the massive unrest of the 1960s, and it is time to resurrect that flame.

This idea of resurrecting, or continuing, the struggle begun in the 1960s. Kevin Gilmartin offers, "Aside from its collapse into the Weathermen, I admired its history and thought it was exciting to see it start back up." Senia Barragan explains that her involvement was partially due to "the very fact that [SDS] had a history. Yes, its history was problematic in lots of ways, but it spoke to such a powerful democratic tradition."

"What really drew me into SDS was its focus on participatory democracy," explains Nick Kreitman. "Essentially the right of the individual to influence the decisions that affect their life, coupled with a lack of an ideological line." To movement veterans like Mark Rudd, such explanations now make sense. The decision to revive the name SDS "links contemporary organizers with a good tradition of theory and practice . . . Young people are studying it to see what they can learn. So adopting the name SDS short circuits them back to the source. It's a brilliant strategy."

"I BELIEVE THAT IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT SDS REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE YOUNG"

Clearly, an important relationship exists between old and new guards, and many current SDS members stress that they want this to be a group that is truly intergenerational. As Josh Russell explains: "I think the idea of reviving a group was a really great way to bring something our movements really need today: genuine intergenerational organizing. Most young people don't have mentors." And former SDS members have been happy to help out, giving advice to new members and flocking to Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS), a group set up to give these veterans an outlet for their political passions and frustrations. Andrew Whitaker, for example, is quick to point out that, without the help of Mark Rudd and other elders, Ole Miss "would not have a group right now." Such developments lend credence to Senia Barragan's belief that a reciprocal relationship can be established between these two camps. As she notes:

So far, the dynamic between the older folks and younger generations of students has been generally healthy . . . I see their involvement as really positive, in that they are offering advice, although not in a fucked up, paternalistic kind of way. They were SDS and experienced all the beauties and problems that came with it, which is not to say we must be under the direct control of the older folks at all! But it would be a sure mistake to not heed to their experiences and knowledge.

This is not to say that there are not tensions between the young and the old organizers. Many of the younger members admit that movement veterans still seem to have a tendency towards ideological sectarianism (which has flared up at least one SDS Regional Conference) and general pushiness. Commenting on such developments, Kevin Gilmartin succinctly states that "The older SDS members on the email listserv sometimes strike me as a little crazy." What seems to trouble college kids the most about older members is the possibility that they will attempt to "hijack" the group, using it to further their political aims while ignoring the thoughts and needs of the new generation. It is therefore not surprising that Michael Harman find that the dynamic between both camps "is sometimes strained, in my personal experience . . . In this regard I believe that it is very important that SDS remain in the hands of the young."

While the kids are wise to pay attention to such issues, it does seem that older activists are getting involved with the new SDS with only noble concerns at heart. Penelope Rosemont, a member of the original SDS—and current co-president of MDS—told me that "As a longtime activist myself, I wanted to support them in this effort." Contrary to the "Yippie-to-Yuppie" myth, many activists from the 1960s have kept their commitment to social justice intact during the past four decades and see their involvement with SDS/MDS as a logical continuation of their activism. To some in the older generation, the new SDS may provide for opportunities to clear up perceived misconceptions of the original group, and highlight that their legacy did not end with the implosion of the organization in 1969: instead, it has led to something new and positive.

"I'M NOT MAKING COFFEE FOR THEM"

The original group was, however, accused of rampant sexism, partially due to the unbridled machismo of Weather Underground. Yet according to Penelope Rosemont:

Men in SDS were much less sexist than in the general population . . . In its heyday, 1966-'68, SDS was full of everyday heroes who made many sacrifices and never surrendered. They were beaten, tear-gassed, and arrested, but they came back and kept fighting. Unfortunately, these genuine rank-and-file heroes have largely been overlooked in books on the subject.

Bob Ross agrees, finding that the Weather Underground—who practiced the "worst kind of gender stuff"—is the primary reason SDS is now associated with sexism. To such veterans, the current round of SDS mobilization—with its insistence on gender equality—may provide the avenue to address such potential historical misunderstandings.

So far, however, these issues are being addressed mostly in theory. As Josh Russell explains, the issue of sexism is "a very large concern. It is part of the baggage that we take when we decide to use the name SDS." Although SDS has yet to fully shed its reputation as a sexist organization, Senia Barragan agrees that the "criticism is incredibly important" and must be dealt with:

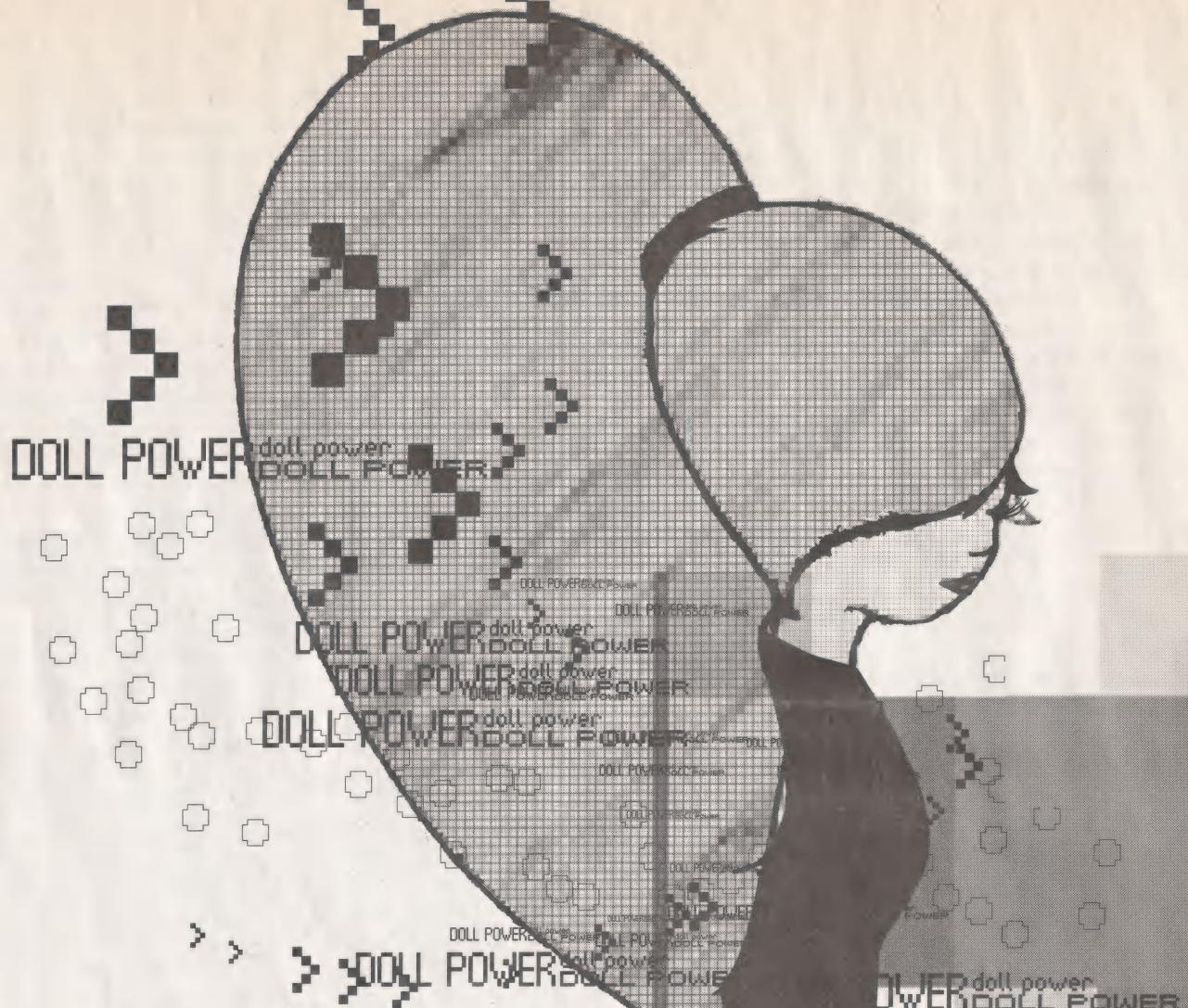
You don't need to look any further than that horrible slogan 'Girls Say Yes to Guys Who Say No.' [an SDS anti-war slogan from the 1960s]. . . So, this new SDS is really thinking and talking and acting on these issues, confronting gender, racial, and class discriminations. I know that

within our chapter we made a clear disclaimer that would be read at the beginning of every meeting announcing that one should constantly be aware of these issues. This is really key.

This commitment to dismantling sexism is also apparent on the national level of SDS. National organizer Josh Russell makes it known that "One of the many ways we are confronting it as an organization is a lot of internal anti-oppression work, both in local meetings and regional conferences." Russell also tells me that "Anti-oppression will be a huge component of our summer Actions Camps . . . We want to organize across barriers in a way that is reciprocal, honest, and respectful." This is, of course, what one would expect a SDS leader to say in 2007. The proof of such a commitment to gender equality and diversity will only be truly apparent when more women like Senia Barragan take leadership roles within the organization.

Many members are quick to admit that sexism is still a problem in SDS, something that even movement veterans such as Mark Rudd and Paul Buhle acknowledge. Perhaps the best indication of the future of SDS on such issues can be seen in the experiences of Claire Cortright, an SDS member from UW-Milwaukee. Asked whether or not she believed that sexism was still a problem within SDS, Cortright replied "Not really. They've all treated me as an equal. So I don't really see that as a problem. I'm not about to make coffee for the boys, and I've never really felt like they expected that of me." And it's apparent that such rhetoric is matched with action. Claire has helped to get such speakers as Jello Biafra and former SDSer William Ayers to Milwaukee, and she is now playing an active role in the group's fight to have products made with sweatshop labor removed from UW-Milwaukee's bookstore. The example of Senia Barragan may also illustrate the new face of SDS. As a first-generation female Latina student, Barragan's membership may indicate that the new SDS may be reaching out women—and women of color—in ways the original group never did.

There may be other results from this still-developing commitment to inclusion. An SDS chapter at a public institution like Old Miss, for example, shows the group moving into territory—the South—that it all but ignored in the 1960s (in January 2007 a Southeast SDS Regional Convention was held in Orlando, Florida). In fact, a great deal of SDS activity is taking place in locations other than northern, elite private institutions, or those institutions that supplied most SDS members 40 years ago. Activists are now springing up at such schools as Eastern New Mexico University, Elmhurst College, and SUNY Purchase—not exactly locations with reputations for student radicalism. While it is still too early to tell if this trend will continue, it has already provided SDS with a greater variety of student activist, and may point the way for a more unified American left, one which is not divided by geography, race, sex, or class. There is little doubt that such a goal is incredibly utopian and may prove impossible to achieve. But at this particular moment in American history, even the mere presence of such a dream may prove immensely powerful. ☺



DOLL POWER

doll power doll power
DOLL POWER

DOLL POWER

By Maya Schenwar
Illustration by Nadine Y Nakanishi

ARE
CORPORATE
VIDEOGAMERS
THE FRAG
DOLLS
GAMING THE
SYSTEM OR
PLAYING BY
THE SAME OLD
RULES?

At first glance, the Frag Dolls are a 21st century set of Spice Girls, gone American: a gaggle of sleek twenty-somethings—with 'tude, mind you—who profess “girl power” while winking at the boys. At second glance, they’re still that—but instead of singing and dancing, the Frag Dolls specialize in sitting with gamepads clutched between their hands. The Dolls are an all-female team of videogamers, sponsored by the French game giant Ubisoft. Their alleged mission? To “promote the presence of women in the gaming industry,” getting both game manufacturers and male-dominated gaming communities to take note of women’s rising interest and influence in the world of videogames.

Frag Doll team member and captain, Morgan Romine—otherwise known as “Rhouette”—says she can’t imagine a life without a controller in hand.

“My first exposure to videogames was watching my cousin play Legend of Zelda when I was six years old,” Romine says. “My parents got me and my brother our Sega Genesis when I was 10 and Sonic the Hedgehog became my new best friend.” Romine dove into online gaming communities in high school, played all through college, and once spent over 30 hours straight on a

frantic gaming spree, glued to EverQuest. As a professional Frag Doll, Romine gets paid to play competitively on XBox Live,

and tour the country to “geek out” about games.

“Growing up, none of us knew very many other girls who played videogames, but now we’re surrounded by girls who share our passion and interest,” Romine says. “We love helping to raise the awareness about our demographic of gamer which traditionally has been so underappreciated.”

The Dolls occasionally take a public stand for their “demographic.” When organizers of the World Series of Videogames (WSVG) announced they’d be holding a “Miss WSVG” contest—AKA, a beauty pageant—at their regional competition in Louisville, Kentucky, the Frag Dolls boycotted the competition. And along with another female gaming team, the PMS clan, they set up a pageant of their own in protest: a *Mr. WSVG* contest. Ostensibly, the Frag Dolls and like teams are an intriguing challenge to the male-dominated ethos of video gaming, confronting stereotypes and discrimination in real worlds and virtual worlds alike.

Too Dolled Up for Feminism?

Yet some feminists argue that the Dolls themselves are one long, videogame-themed beauty pageant. Members were selected partially based on their looks, and their site (www.fragdolls.com) is chock-full of sexy photos. Their blogs list their physical characteristics before each entry (height, hair color, eye color). And each Frag Doll is represented by a videogame-esque caricature of herself: big boobs, tiny waist, huge eyes framed by luscious lashes, and a seductive, cherry-red smile.

The Frag Dolls’ emphasis on looks is carried over to real-life personas as well—glamorous photos abound on their website and in promotional materials. Other communities of female gamers argue that the Frag Dolls send a message that equates “professional female gamer” with “model.”

ComicGirl, a longtime member of the femme-centered online gamer community Thumb Bandits, notes that although the Frag Dolls are the most high-profile female gaming team, they’re also the least game-focused.

“Gaming should be about games, not what you look like or what clothes you wear,” ComicGirl says. “[The Frag Dolls] are kind of just booth babes that happen to play games.”

And according to Mia Consalvo, a telecommunications professor at Ohio University whose research focuses on gender in gaming, the Frag Dolls’ “girl power” agenda doesn’t promote the images of “girls” and “power” that will garner women lasting respect in gaming communities.

“Wow—look—women play games too!” is the type of thing you usually read [about groups like the Frag Dolls],” Consalvo says. “It’s more of a ‘here’s an oddball thing’ type of coverage rather than a serious look at how more women are playing games. It can also marginalize other types of female players, particularly if the accounts focus on how young and hot female players are—that really doesn’t do anyone any favors.”

It’s not just feminist theorists and rival gamers who are concerned about the image of “girl gamers” that the Frag Dolls create: Siren, formerly the Frag Doll Voodoo, broke off from the group when she became tired of constantly representing a prescribed “female gamer” image. She and likeminded gaming partner Vixen have since created the site, VersuS, which offers blogs, forums, and independent views about gaming. The VersuS duo regularly attends gaming events, hosts its own online tournaments, and keeps readers up to date on new games—no matter what corporation is producing them. And although VersuS’s founders are both women, they avoid a Frag-Doll-like focus on the “girl gamer” persona.

“I don’t see any need to whack the word ‘girl’ or the word ‘female’ when talking about an activity like gaming,” Vixen said. “It’s just like a big label saying ‘notice me, I’m stepping out of the norm.’ Really it would be nice to work more on making a name for yourself as a great gamer rather than one who stands out merely for being female.”

While the Frag Dolls defy the stereotype that girls don’t play videogames, they may be promoting a more insidious stereotype. It’s the image of the Sexy Girl Gamer who resembles the sexy female game character—and is just as corporately manufactured.

Selling the Dolls

The Frag Dolls' hot-yet-hardcore persona mirrors the female characters that inhabit videogames—often, it seems, for the sole purpose of adding sex appeal to the games. Consalvo suspects that Ubisoft intends the Dolls to have a similar effect on the gaming community, using sex to sell more games.

"I would say that the markets targeted would include more young men than young women—it seems to be more about marketing sex appeal than encouraging women to play," she says. "When was the last time you saw a game ad in *Glamour*, for example?"

You probably haven't. But if you've ever visited the site of America's Army (AA)—the US army's official videogame—you may have spotted some photos of Frag Dolls enthusiastically engaged in "realtime" combat. Turns out that Ubisoft produces AA, which is marketed almost exclusively to male consumers, as a tool for army recruitment. Signing on as a Frag Doll, then, means agreeing to embody a whole set of pre-inscribed ideas and philosophies, already determined by the company. Instead of spearheading a new generation of female power-gamers, the Frag Dolls may simply be disseminating the (male-centric) status quo, says Gadget Girl, a Thumb Bandit regular.

"Corporate sponsorship gives them a voice and an image," Gadget Girl says. "It allows them to perpetuate ideas that are already in existence and to cater to male fantasy." In this view, the Frag Dolls serve as mascots or symbols; objects intended to set off a certain male reaction.

No matter what market the Dolls are targeting, corporate sponsorship is counter to the goal of making the gaming world more equal for women, or anyone else, Vixen says. If more women are buying games because they've been lured in by a marketing ploy, that's manipulation—not feminism. (Keep in mind that, although the Frag Dolls are female, the marketers who conceptualized them are overwhelmingly male.)

"People do not like to feel that they have been pushed or even conned into buying something," she says. "The Frag Dolls are always essentially there to sell and promote for a game developer. They are the adverts."

Yet, if the Frag Dolls are indeed more Ubisoft-manufactured symbolage than feminist gamer-power, why the supergrrrl portrayal? Again, the answer may have more to do with the convoluted figure of the female videogame character than the physical reality of real women who play videogames.

Playing the Girl Gamer

Who is the girl inside the videogame? Chances are, Consalvo says, she's one of a few stock characters: the princess who must be rescued, the deceptive seductress, the opponent who flashes her underwear when she loses. Even games that contain elements of resistance often follow standard patterns of gender-creation. Consalvo points to Final Fantasy XI, which incorporates the Mithra, a matriarchal race of hunt-

ers of whom only the females are playable. Though powerful and fem-centric, the Mithra are also catlike, sultry-eyed, and body-baring—and FFXI doesn't offer the option of outfitting them with pants.

ComicGirl notes that many videogames don't even offer the option of a female character; in games like Gears of War (one of Vixen's top picks), the cast is 100 percent male.

"It's set in the future or another world, so you'd think a female soldier would be alright," ComicGirl says. "A bit silly really that games are fantasy, but they stick to rigid real world 'laws' about gender."

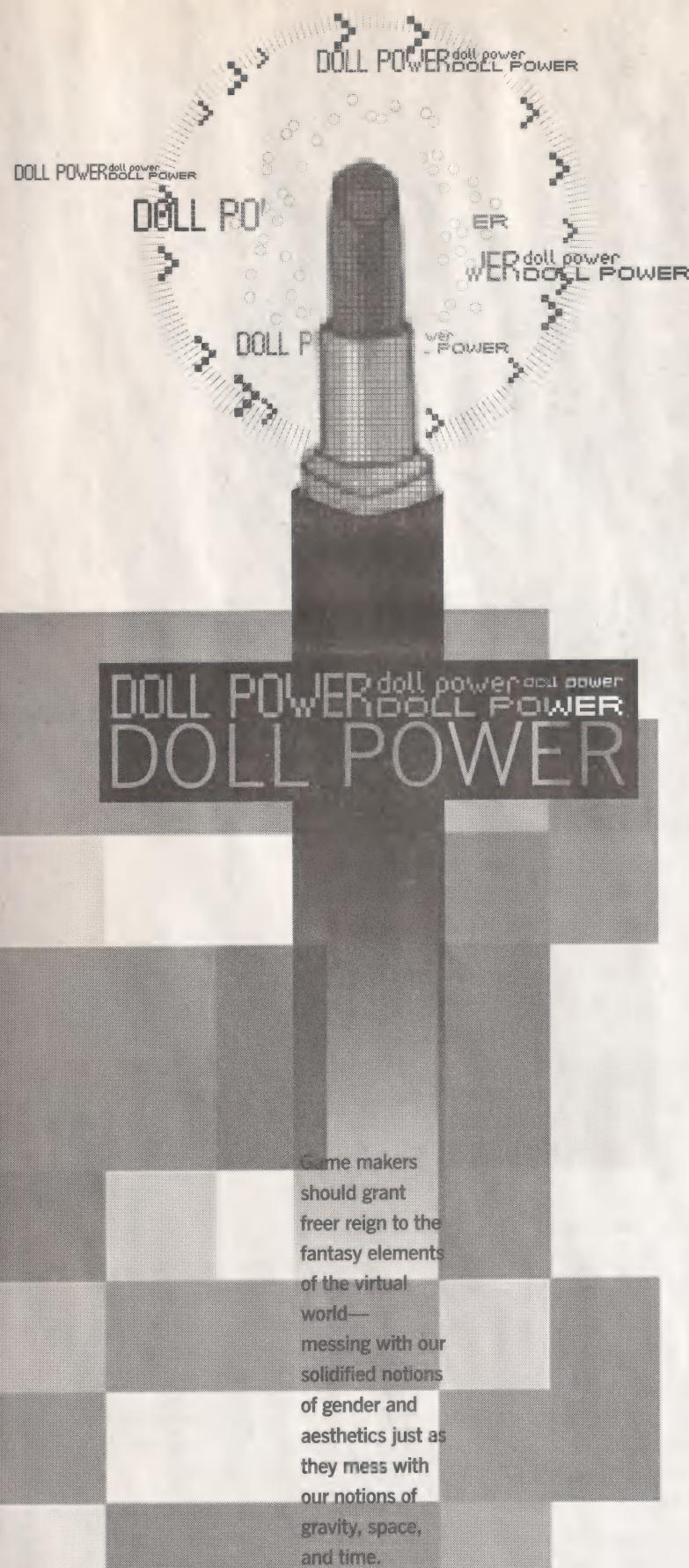
Vixen argues that many videogames feature cool female characters, strong-but-sexy women like Lara Croft of Tomb Raider, who Vixen calls "someone to look up to," comparing her to the leading lady of a Hollywood film.

Yet must "strong" videogame females always be *sexy*, like the 5'9", 115-pound, 34C-busted Lara? Many of the sites that challenge the Frag-Doll-esque objectification of female gamers don't question the sex-appeal ideal. Like the Frag Dolls, the VersuS girls devote a large portion of their website to photos and videos of themselves dressed in sexy outfits. (Their specialty is "posing like there's no tomorrow with freaky arm sock things.") Vixen and Siren's poses often mimic the postures of videogame characters they admire: fists in the air, scantily clad limbs swinging, hair blowing in the virtual wind. Where are all the not-so-conventionally-attractive female gamers to go—the ones who don't resemble Lara Croft? Many feminist gamers argue that instead of cloning more "Dolls," game manufacturers should grant freer reign to the fantasy elements of the virtual world—messing with our solidified notions of gender and aesthetics just as they mess with our notions of gravity, space and time.

Revolution 1.0: A Whole New Game

It may be unfair to expect teams like the Frag Dolls—or VersuS—to revolutionize gaming culture, turning it feminist with a flutter of their (perfectly manicured) virtual hands. Instead, Consalvo says, the games *themselves* need to change—challenging stereotypes instead of reinforcing them—in order for women to feel welcome in gaming communities.

Is such a radical gaming evolution possible? Yep, according to Consalvo: despite their current boys' club



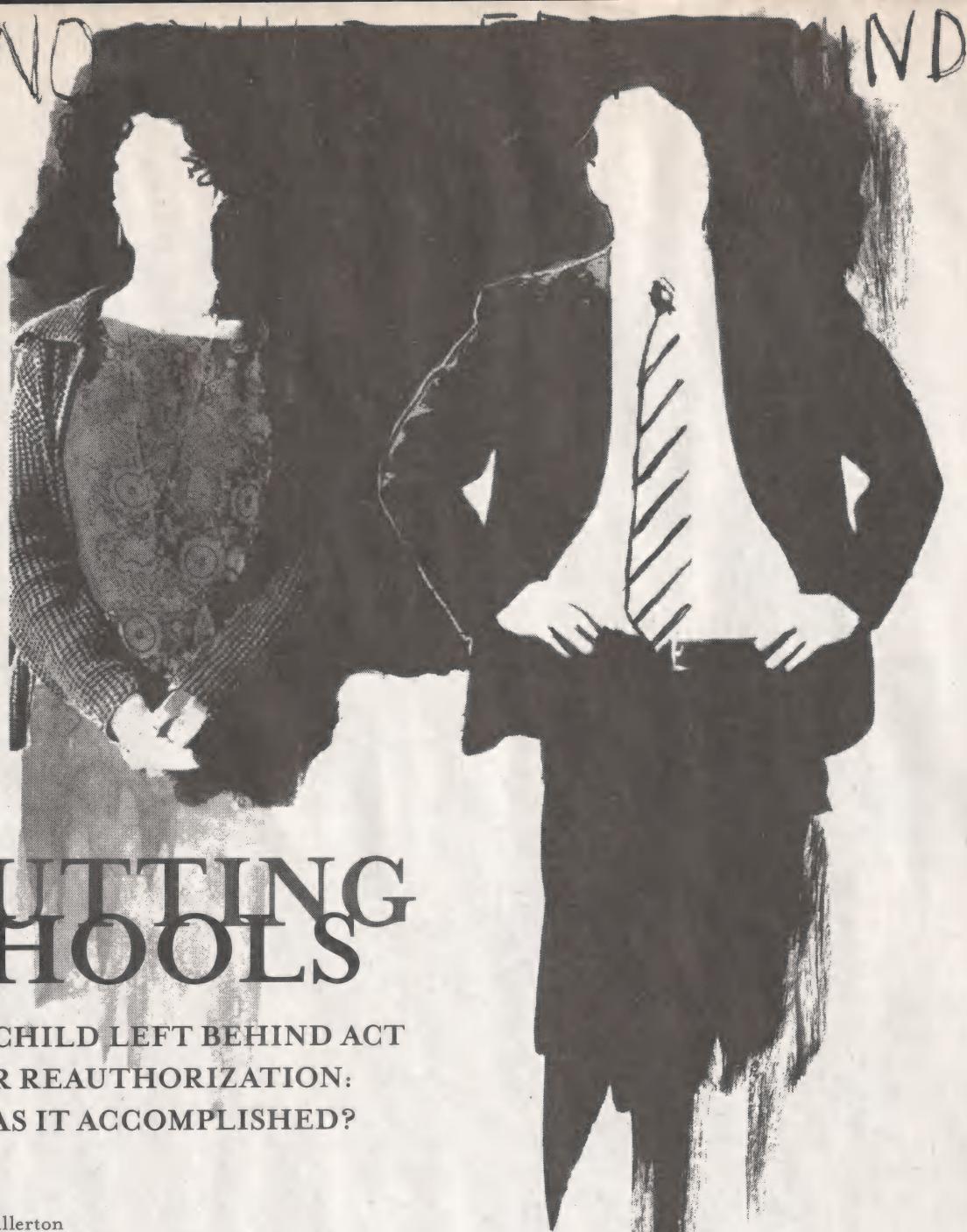
image, videogames are in a prime position to mess with stereotypes. They're interactive, and therefore have the constant potential to challenge players' expectations. The player may fight a gun battle in one moment, and then in the next, be confronted with a male character bursting into tears. Consalvo points to new games like *The Bard's Tale*, which parodies the standard save-the-princess plotline, and *Primal* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, which feature female characters in lead roles. She also notes that nonviolent games like *Dance Dance Revolution* (a danceoff based on rhythm and foot positioning) and *Katamari Damacy* (a surreal quest to rebuild the moon and stars) have been widening the audience for videogames, and especially attracting more women. ComicGirl notes new possibilities emerging in games where players can create their own characters that need not fit into standardized conceptions of the female game-heroine.

Until the day when videogame companies and gaming culture wake up to the complexities of gender, Consalvo stresses the importance of websites like womengamers.com, where communities of feminist-minded gamers can convene to critique the gaming industry, question gender and race assumptions, envision a virtual future of peace and equality, and obsess about their favorite games—no wide-eyed, huge-boobed accompanying caricatures required. Geek Woman, a top writer for womengamers.com, says these sites form the core of female gaming culture. They're where the women who are most serious about gaming go to find like minds . . . and where savvy game manufacturers should be spending more time.

"All those people doing psychological studies and taking surveys will never have a clue into the female gamer's psyche," says Geek Woman, who's been gaming since 1979. "We are the people that developers should be talking to."

On the Thumb Bandits site, visitors can read game reviews alongside academic studies such as "Does Lara Croft Wear Fake Polygons? Gender Analysis of the 3rd Person Shooter/Adventure Game with Female Heroine." The site even includes *The Vagina Gamerlogues*, a blog that examines current gaming trends through a feminist lens. As communities like Women Gamers and Thumb Bandits expand, feminist gamers hope that the changing of stock gender roles will become an integral part of the evolution of videogames. At the very least, they say, the sites help spread the spirit of questioning those stereotypes among gamers, instead of simply promoting the games' status quo, ala *Frag Dolls*. They provide a space for female gamers to imagine the kinds of games they'd like to play—female main character included.

"Design me a female, gum-chewing, pigtailed, kung fu-fightin' girl, in a leather jacket to play as," suggests Geek Woman, "and don't forget to pay me my royalties for the idea." ©



GUTTING SCHOOLS

THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT
IS UP FOR REAUTHORIZATION:
WHAT HAS IT ACCOMPLISHED?

Words by Ali Cullerton
Illustration by Liz Tapp

On January 8, 2002 President George W Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The act states an unprecedented increase in federal resources to states to improve low-performing schools. In turn, the federal government expects more accountability from state education systems and the guarantee that "no child will be left behind." To fulfill these expectations, states are required to increase student testing, collect and disseminate subgroup results, ensure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, and guarantee that all students, regardless of socioeconomic factors, achieve a proficient level of education by the 2014-2015 school year.

With the federal funding comes an unprecedented increase of federal mandates and sanctions. The requirements placed on states to increase testing, ensure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, and hold schools accountable for the performance of all students. The penalties associated with NCLB are harsh. Such penalties include loss of funding for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) and students of low-performing schools having the option to transfer to higher scoring schools.

While the federal government's description of NCLB may seem positive, as it places focus on the achievement of academic standards and addresses literacy concerns, the reality of NCLB



is significantly frowned upon by educators. While federal money is only nine percent of overall spending on education, many schools cannot go without that support. Although educational reform policy has been commonplace in the United States since the 1960's, it is NCLB that has caused an immediate wave of disapproval from a majority of educators throughout the nation.

Before NCLB, we had reform policies such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Clinton's Goals 2000. What had been called the Office for Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) became Educational Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) under President Bush. Many believe this is where the problem started. While OERI allowed more quantitative or topic-specific data, which offered a better balance between all different types of research, ESRA provides generalized data that is difficult to decipher. Many educators fear the fact that proof of old legislations, such as OERI, has ceased to exist. Websites with information on OERI have been filtered to the point where, while trying to research them, one will immediately be linked back to the government's educational page, which describes more current law. When Bush became president, liberal and progressive educational acts were changed, although education is not bi-partisan. What's worse is how proof of the legislation of yesterday has almost ceased to exist.

The original legislation of NCLB was a partnership between Senator Ted Kennedy and the Republican Party. The idea was to provide all students with the opportunity to get the education that they are entitled to. Many believe the problem began with the lack of funds and the business model chosen by these politicians, others view NCLB as a great idea with poor execution, while others still, see NCLB as a backwards plot to privatize public schooling.

From the beginning, NCLB was based on a business model. Especially in urban schools, business and market "work related themes" and managerial concepts are used. This notion is one based on efficiency, effectiveness, and organization. Instead of a teacher, you have a classroom manager and instead of a student, you are left with a mere investment. Under NCLB, teachers are called, "efficiency technicians." Forget the years that teachers studied in graduate school, forget the individuality within students that allow for diversity and rich classroom culture, NCLB has come up with an easier way to get our country smart again.

One of the most evident problems associated with NCLB is its underfunding. According to the Educational Work Force, President Bush has consistently broken his promise to fully fund NCLB. In 2006 alone, schools needed \$36.9 billion to pay for the requirements of NCLB, such as a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, and only received \$23.7 billion. The difference of \$13.2 billion directly affects schools that are struggling to reach their AYP.

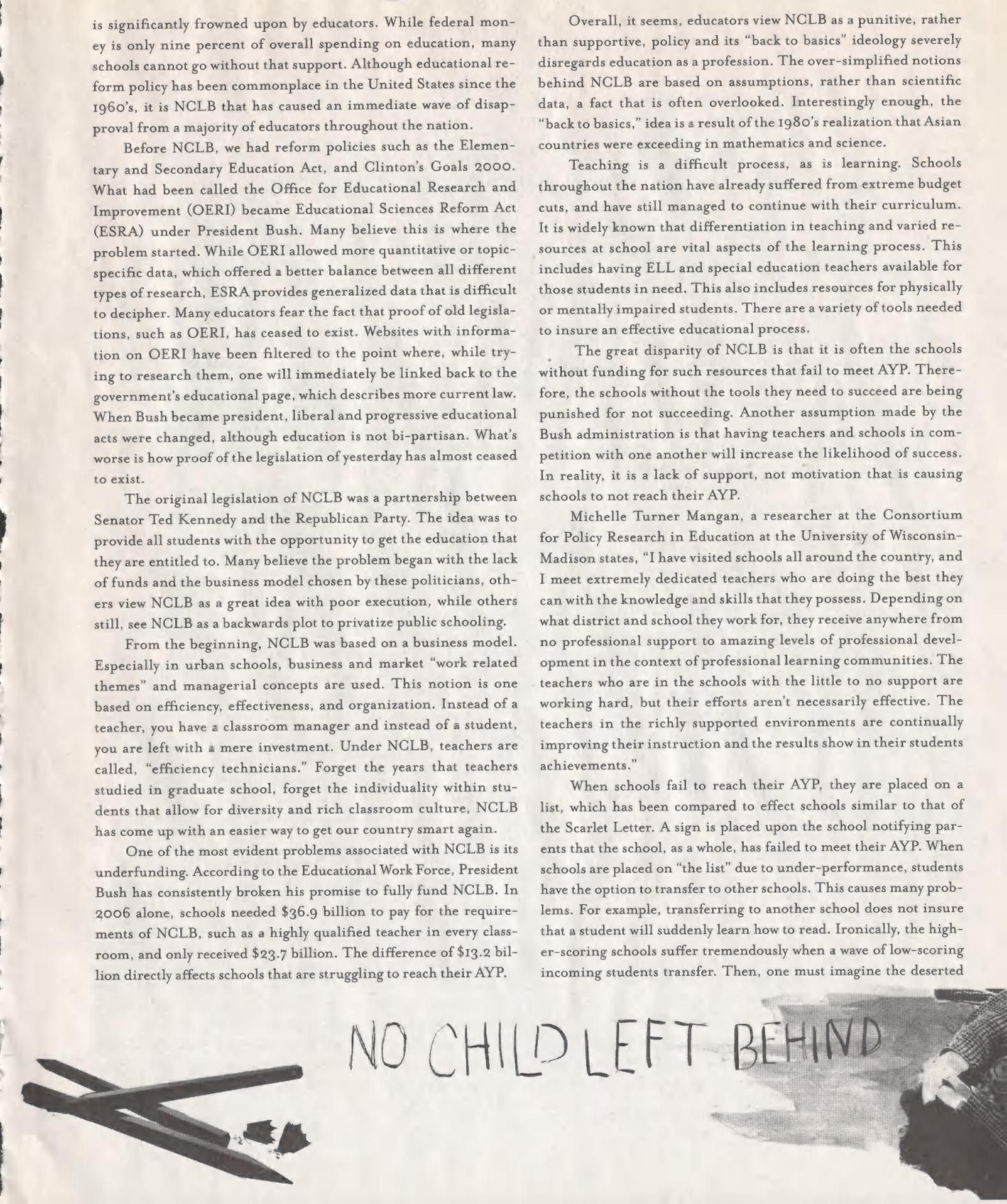
Overall, it seems, educators view NCLB as a punitive, rather than supportive, policy and its "back to basics" ideology severely disregards education as a profession. The over-simplified notions behind NCLB are based on assumptions, rather than scientific data, a fact that is often overlooked. Interestingly enough, the "back to basics," idea is a result of the 1980's realization that Asian countries were exceeding in mathematics and science.

Teaching is a difficult process, as is learning. Schools throughout the nation have already suffered from extreme budget cuts, and have still managed to continue with their curriculum. It is widely known that differentiation in teaching and varied resources at school are vital aspects of the learning process. This includes having ELL and special education teachers available for those students in need. This also includes resources for physically or mentally impaired students. There are a variety of tools needed to insure an effective educational process.

The great disparity of NCLB is that it is often the schools without funding for such resources that fail to meet AYP. Therefore, the schools without the tools they need to succeed are being punished for not succeeding. Another assumption made by the Bush administration is that having teachers and schools in competition with one another will increase the likelihood of success. In reality, it is a lack of support, not motivation that is causing schools to not reach their AYP.

Michelle Turner Mangan, a researcher at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison states, "I have visited schools all around the country, and I meet extremely dedicated teachers who are doing the best they can with the knowledge and skills that they possess. Depending on what district and school they work for, they receive anywhere from no professional support to amazing levels of professional development in the context of professional learning communities. The teachers who are in the schools with the little to no support are working hard, but their efforts aren't necessarily effective. The teachers in the richly supported environments are continually improving their instruction and the results show in their students' achievements."

When schools fail to reach their AYP, they are placed on a list, which has been compared to effect schools similar to that of the Scarlet Letter. A sign is placed upon the school notifying parents that the school, as a whole, has failed to meet their AYP. When schools are placed on "the list" due to under-performance, students have the option to transfer to other schools. This causes many problems. For example, transferring to another school does not insure that a student will suddenly learn how to read. Ironically, the higher-scoring schools suffer tremendously when a wave of low-scoring incoming students transfer. Then, one must imagine the deserted



NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

NOTHING COULD TURN STUDENTS OFF TO LEARNING MORE THAN THE STERILE ENVIRONMENT OF STANDARDIZED-TEST PREPARATION.

schools where teachers are faced with the fight of their life, without tools for protection. Many students transfer back to their original school within a year, realizing that a change in location does not equate better grades. This, however, does not mean the school goes back to normal. Once placed on the list, schools are given a certain amount of time, with no added funding to get their act together. When they fail to do so, they are simply closed down.

Aside from the suffering of a great blow to a school's reputation, NCLB often threatens the very schools that house the most motivated of all teachers. It is at the urban schools, with the "at-risk" youth, where teachers are penalized for failing to meet the regulations stated by the government, who so severely underfunds their attempts to succeed. The option to transfer to another school for a better education is an idea that is not all together terrible. This option, however, would take years of planning, and a lot of funding, before being significant enough to offer to students. It has been suggested that schools to be given the chance to operate with adequate funding before students have the choice to leave. This suggestion, however, has come to no avail.

The scare in all of this is the way in which NCLB is being implemented in our schools. Many teachers throughout the country are resorting to "teaching to the tests" rather than focusing on higher-order thinking and individual student ability. Creative outlets, essential aspects of student growth and success, are being cut, while teachers are forced to focus whole-heartedly on math, science and reading. This is seen in urban schools much more than suburban schools. The numbers show that it is often the schools struggling to reach their AYP that are forced to drop art, music, or theater in attempts to concentrate on preparing students for standardized tests.

Nothing could turn students off to learning more than the sterile environment of standardized-test preparation. What happened to the learning? While math and literacy are topics of extreme importance, the ultimate goal of higher order thinking, the ability to apply lessons to the "real world", has been overshadowed with the attempt to achieve high test scores on a standardized test. Rather than trying to stay off "the list," teachers should have the

support to set goals that correspond to state standards. Then they will need the tools to implement their goals. The priority has been skewed here, rather than threatening punishments, why not provide professional development for all teachers?

One upside to these overwhelmingly negative events, according to Sue Lenski Ph.D., a teacher-educator for Portland State University graduate students, is that, "even though the achievement gap has been acknowledged for decades, only now has there been a concerted effort to understand why some groups of students do not achieve to the extent of other groups." NCLB has given us the data to focus on the achievement gap, but what will educators be able to do with that information?

Unfortunately, low-performing schools continue to lose support from the moment they are seen as under-performing, and often shut down. This leads to what has been called, "apartheid schooling," in where schools with students of high socioeconomic status succeed and excel, and schools with students of low socioeconomic status suffer and eventually close down all together. It is at this point, where educators shutter with the mere thought of corporate inclusion, or the privatization of schools. These two entities, however, are the only options to underfunded, low-scoring schools. Schools simply need money to succeed. Some teachers believe that NCLB was, in fact, issued to privatize public schooling, thus creating a more efficient, corporate-like educational system in the United States.

The Edison Schools already provide us with an example to what happens to schools that are forced to close. The Edison Project, founded in 1992 by Channel One's Chris Whittle, is the country's leading private manager of public schools. This corporate model has been implemented in 150 public schools, and affected over 80,000 students. The back-to-basics curriculum does not vary. Edison Schools are run like factories where students are on the assembly line, learning the same thing in the same way and at the same time as students miles away.

It has become a trend for leaders in the US Department of Education to fund grants for testing companies, charter schools run by for-profit companies and other models, such as the Edi-



SCHOOL IS HELL

ALEXANDRA MARTINEZ

My name is Alexandra Martinez. I am 16, a sophomore at Rialto High School. Nowadays it seems like a curse to say that because, truthfully, the public education system is crap. Sure, some areas of the country have great public education systems, but for me that is not the case. I live in Southern California about an hour away from LA. I attend a high school that uses the motto "Committed to Excellence." I'm not quite sure it reaches these standards. Just around three weeks ago a teacher was arrested for having sex with one of his students, and around that same time there was a serious car accident right in front of the school. Last time I checked one girl was in a coma and another was dead. In the course of about three months, three students have died. The neighborhood is pretty old but some new houses are getting built, so the city is moving along quite well. It is not the best environment, but it is also not the worst.

The classes and teachers are pretty good. I am taking AP European History, which is really great because my teacher wants us to think and not memorize dates and names and places. The class discussion is incredible because we don't just sit there and listen to some boring lecture the whole time. We talk, yell, and teach other what happened during what war or revolution. You could compare this to a real college class since there is hardly ever homework due every day, just a whole notebook due at the end of each semester. English is another great class. My teacher is really free-spirited and teaches us more than just reading and writing. She makes us act out scenes of books so we can get more into it and understand metaphors and imagery. In my Chemistry, French, and Algebra II classes, it's just straightforward, from-the-book teaching. You could say the classes are pretty crowded. There's about 32 kids in each of my classes.

Every time Standardized Testing (the end-of-year tests everyone has to take) rolls around, the administration is down our throats about passing the tests because if we don't do well enough, the school will be taken over by the state. This will happen because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Now, teachers have to teach us by a set of standards. Every day there are constant reminders written on the board. If the government takes over because of the NCLB, learning won't be as deep as before. By saying this, I mean that instead of learning tons of details and different views on things, teachers will teach exactly and only what is needed to pass the tests. This puts a lot of pressure on school districts to get the schools to pass, and sometimes they even leave out minority groups, like me, to put themselves in favor of making it seem like the majority of the school passed the test.

High school, in the social sense, is probably no different than it was in past years, of course there are still little groups and cliques, and of course that one teacher you will always hate and that one you will always love. But high school in the educational sense is different now. Teachers aren't really able to teach what they want. They have to follow standards and teach them before testing comes along or else the blame will fall on their shoulders. The laws government has passed make high school a lot more stressful for both teachers and students. Now we can really say that high school is hell and actually have something of a point. ☺

son Project and the National Heritage Academies Inc., that adhere to the business strategy. While early charter schools provided the advantages of highly customized, special school learning programs that would nurture children in small settings, large corporations have intruded, threatening the original charter model. Now, corporations help local groups apply for charter status in turn for buying the parent company's curriculum products. These schools accept packaged programs, yet are still funded publicly.

Even more difficult to understand is how exactly NCLB defines public and private schools. These foggy rules re-define charter, public and private schools, allowing for an intrusion of federal funding. In turn, faith-based providers are receiving federal funding for education. In June of 2002, The Supreme Court, approved faith-based charter schools in Cleveland, Ohio, opening the door to the public funding of schooling by religious groups. Parental choice was central to this decision, which overlooked the constitutional right of the separation of church and state.

Amid what may seem like a helpless situation, NCLB is up for re-authorization by Congress in 2007. Teacher input is a vital aspect of this re-authorization, but few know if the voices of educators will even have the opportunity to be heard. Some think that with the state of the current war, NCLB will go from being under-funded to being hardly funded at all. This is when the real questions come. Will the newly-dominant Democrats throw out NCLB all together? If so, what will it be replaced with? Will educators have a say in the form in which federal funding will be presented? What will happen to the schools that were closed under NCLB?

At the end of the day, and somewhere between the muddle of questions, grey definitions, and exhausted educators, it is clear that our public schools are suffering. Our focus is lost; student access to equal education is crumbling before our very eyes. Most discouraging, what may have started in attempt to help education has tackled the very backbone of accomplishment. ☺

DEFENDING TUWANI

In a centuries-old West Bank town, Palestinian villagers, international peace teams, and Israeli activists unite in the face of settler violence and military interference.

By Maya Schenwar

Among the South Hebron Hills, a land of harsh topography, little electricity and no running water, sits the village of Tuwani. Here, villagers attempt to carry on the lifestyle that has sustained them for centuries: they graze sheep and goats, travel by foot or donkey, weave crafts and grow lentils, wheat, chickpeas, figs and rice, despite dry soil and little rain. Some live in tin-roofed houses, others in caves that are said to date back to Roman times. Sandwiched between two deserts, the village has developed a full, self-sustaining economy. Yet in the past 25 years, life in Tuwani has taken a drastic turn—in the early 1980s Israeli settlers arrived to establish outposts on the lands surrounding the village. Since then, Palestinians in the area have struggled to maintain their community in the face of a constant threat of its destruction.

The Israeli settlement movement is no new concept for Palestinians. Since the 1970s, settlers have been setting up outposts on Palestinian land in territories occupied by Israel, such as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Some settlers claim historical and biblical Jewish connections with the occupied

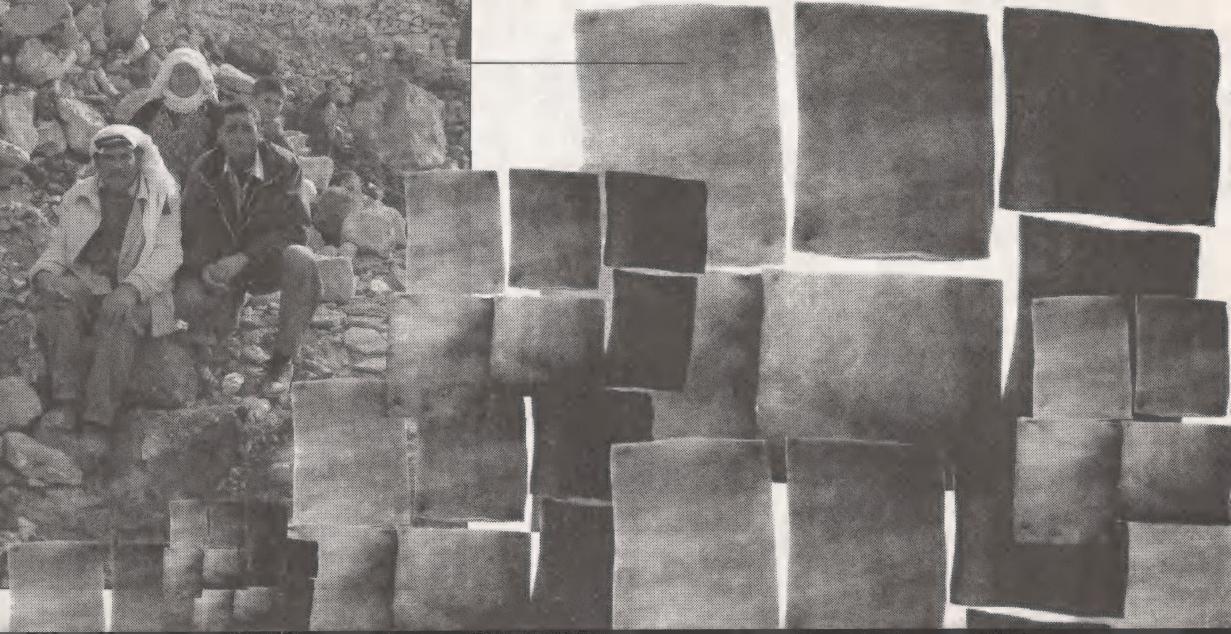
lands; others argue that their presence is strategically necessary for Israel's security. Some settlements have been disclaimed by the Israeli government, others are accepted or even promoted by it, but almost universally, the settlements pose a danger to the Palestinians who live on or nearby the land they are occupying.

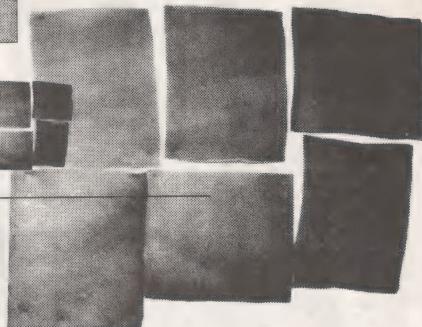
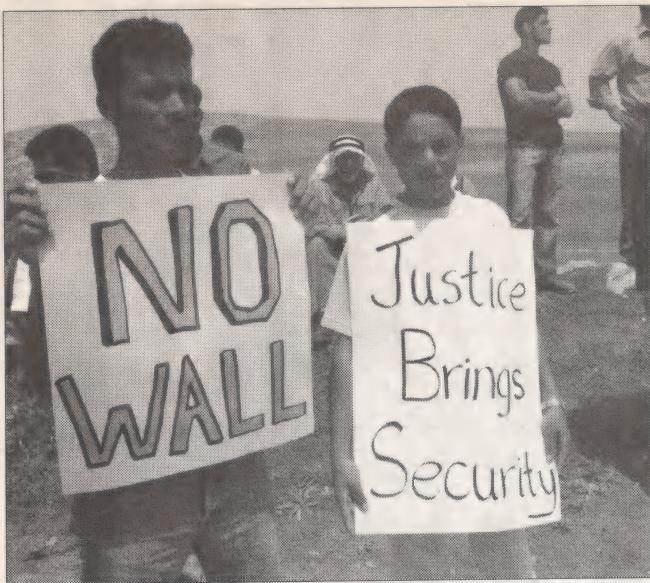
Soon after they arrived in South Hebron, settlers began attacking Palestinian shepherds and farmers, uprooting Tuwani's olive trees and stealing its people's sheep. Since Tuwani falls within the section of the occupied West Bank most dominated by the Israeli government's authority, the settlers weren't the only ones responsible for attacks on the village. The Israeli army began destroying houses and mosques, arguing that villagers had not obtained official permits to build on the land. Attacks from both sides continue today.

"The situation in the South Hebron Hills exemplifies the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," says Joel Guldridge, a member of the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) that maintains a presence in Tuwani. "Palestinians living here in the southern West Bank face a dual occupation: the occupation by Israel and the occupation by Israeli settlers."



Family sitting in the ruins of their home in Qawawis, near Tuwani. The Israeli army demolished four family dwellings on the 14 February, 2007, leaving at least 30 people homeless.





Clockwise: Villagers holding signs at the side of the bypass road. Ibrahim Ahmed Abu Ram family sitting in the ruins of their home in Qawawis, near Tuwani. Tuwani woman pleads with Israeli soldiers.

In the years since 1980, both threats have grown stronger. To both settlers and the military, the South Hebron Hills region seems a perfect candidate for annexation, due to its proximity to the Israeli border and its small population, according to a report by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem. Constant anxiety for their lives and land has prompted many villagers to migrate elsewhere. Hafez Hereni, a village leader who has lived in Tuwani all his life, is one of the few remaining residents.

"Seven or eight hundred people lived in Tuwani before 1980," Hereni says. "Now there are two hundred. Because of settler attacks, most of them have left."

Settlers and Soldiers: Intermingling Dangers

Since the people of Tuwani live mostly as shepherds and farmers, the intrusion of the settlers affects their existence in a very direct way. "Settlements have stolen much of the land that the people depend on," Hereni says. "This affects their whole lives; their land was everything."

Land theft has disrupted not only the village's basic subsistence, but also the organization of its economy. Prior to the settlements, land was designated specifically for fodder, wheat, lentils, and grazing, depending on the depth and quality of the soil. As the settlers indiscriminately appropriate land, poverty levels are soaring and many people are starving in this region that was once self-sustaining, according to Laura Ciaghi, a peace activist with the organization Operation Dove, which has maintained a presence in Tuwani since 2004.

"People used to have flocks of hundreds, now the average flock is 20 sheep," Ciaghi says. "Stealing land is the largest form of violence, but it's also the least visible." Settlers have also planted poison pellets in Tuwani fields, killing sheep and crops.

Along with land, water is Palestine's most limited resource. In more populous parts of Palestine, the Israel government controls over 50 percent of the water supply, selling the water back to Palestinians at elevated prices. This phenomenon doesn't present a problem in Tuwani because there is no running water, but the settlers have interfered with the water supply by assuming control of many of the village's wells. Other wells have been poisoned.

"Last year there was a huge drought, and I remember perfectly going down to the well, and trying desperately to get water," Ciaghi says. "But up in the settlements, we could see the settlers watering their gardens."

Physical attacks often happen in association with land: for example, shepherds and farmers are assaulted in their fields. In fact, the first documented attack in Tuwani was in 1984, when settlers began striking shepherds and their sheep with sticks. Sometimes, though, attacks happen with no apparent motivation besides intimidation and aggression. Amnesty International has reported many settler attacks on Palestinian schoolchildren on their way to the village school. Midnight ambushes on South Hebron villages are not uncommon, says Heidi Schramm, a CPT member based in Tuwani.

"These Palestinians risk their lives every day in order to do the most basic things necessary for life," Schramm says. "This reality is not unique to Tuwani. Such abuse takes place wherever settlers are allowed to act with impunity."

Settlers don't hold a monopoly on abuse and theft in Tuwani. The South Hebron Hills fall within the boundaries of Palestine's "Area C," over which the Israeli government retains authority. Therefore, according to both international and Israeli law, the Israeli army (Israeli Defense Forces, or IDF) is responsible for protecting the region's inhabitants against the settlers. The Fourth Ge-

neva Conventions state that an occupying power is accountable for the welfare of the occupied population. But in Tuwani, Hafez Hereni says, the army often seems more like a threat than a shield.

"The army is pushing from the south, settlements are pushing from the north," he says. "The soldiers are supposed to care about security of everyone, but they only protect security of settlers."

In fact, soldiers sometimes pose a security threat themselves. The IDF reserves the right to demolish buildings that aren't backed by an official Israeli construction permit. Most people in Tuwani don't have permits, so the enforcement of this policy means the frequent destruction of houses, centuries-old cave homes, mosques and even outdoor bathrooms built by international NGOs. The home of Tuwani's mayor was recently demolished.

IDF control amounts to more than destruction within the village; it also sometimes prevents residents from leaving it. The army often blocks the only Palestinian road that connects the village to larger population centers, like the city of Yatta, where the only medical clinic in the area is located. A recently erected separation barrier has further restricted villagers' access to markets, schools and even their own farmland. The army's increasing presence in the region also means more opportunities for mistreatment of Palestinians: confiscating property, harassing villagers during "routine checks" and searching houses in the middle of the night, Schramm says. IDF authority in Tuwani perpetuates a psychological atmosphere of ongoing tension, unpredictability and fear.

Nonviolent Defense in Tuwani: An International Effort

As attacks on Tuwani increased on both fronts, activists outside the village began to get wind of the atrocities occurring in southern Hebron. In 2001, the IDF demolished the cave homes of the village of Suissa's residents, and the Arab/Jewish peace organization Ta'ayush filed suit on the villagers' behalf. Ta'ayush won the case and the villagers returned to their land. Strong ties began to develop between Ta'ayush and Tuwani; both parties realized that as Jews and Israelis, members of Ta'ayush could exert a greater influence on soldiers and settlers.

"Our activity is, on the one hand, to accompany farmers and villagers when they are trying to work their land, and are kept from doing that," says Liat Hasenfratz, a member of Ta'ayush who has been involved in efforts in Tuwani for the past four and a half years. "On the other hand, it is to bring human rights organizations there and to support the people legally."

The idea of accompaniment proved key to preventing attacks on Tuwani: with Israelis around, settlers and soldiers were less likely to interfere with villagers' lives. Ta'ayush members began to stay in Tuwani on weekends to accompany residents and meet with village leaders. However, this system soon proved difficult to maintain. The Israelis had few financial resources and needed to work during the week, so they couldn't provide a daily presence in the village. Ta'ayush members also feared they were putting a strain on the villagers who hosted them each weekend. Plus, the IDF began to grow frustrated with Ta'ayush's presence in South Hebron—the army demolished two shelters that Ta'ayush set up in its attempt to maintain a more consistent presence in Tuwani.

Ta'ayush members, other Israeli peace advocates and Tuwani residents all agreed that it was time to call in a broader base of support: international activists, who would draw attention to human rights abuses in the region and, hopefully, increase safety for Palestinians in their daily lives.

"Having an international presence is a pulling factor for the media," says Laura Ciaghi of Operation Dove. "It's sad, but it's the reality. If the army evacuates Israelis, no one hears about it. If the army evacuated us, there would be much more media attention." Gulledge notes that, though settlers had been attacking Palestinian schoolchildren for years, Israel only sent in armed soldiers to escort the children to school after members of CPT, Operation Dove and Amnesty International were first attacked in 2004—and the events were reported in the international press.

In addition to attracting external media, groups like Operation Dove and Christian Peacemaker Teams themselves provide regular documentation of the situation in Tuwani. Equipped with cameras and recorders, they bear witness to incidents involving settlers and soldiers, keeping the rest of the world updated via blogs and websites.

Documentation isn't painless work, in this case: internationals have been threatened and even attacked by settlers. They've had to refine their methods to both avoid violence and ensure that word gets out.

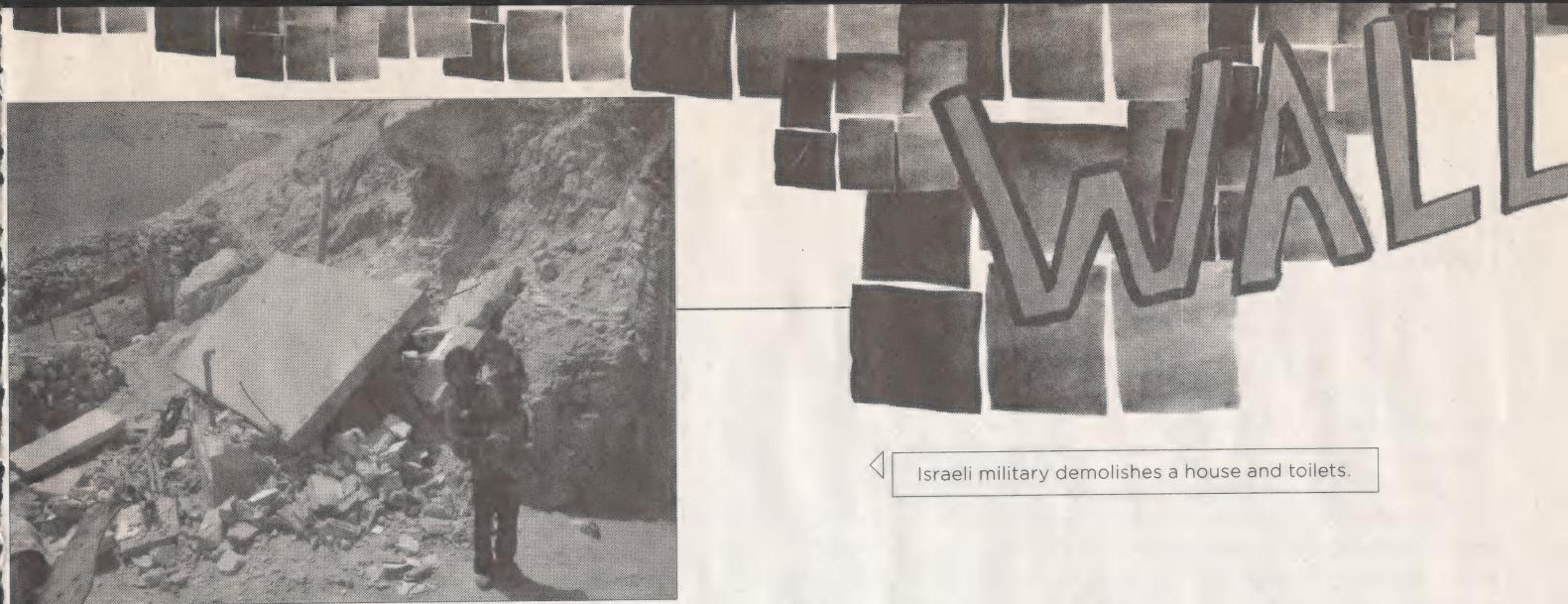
"The first time we were ambushed by settlers, two CPTers were beaten up and their cameras were stolen," Ciaghi says. Nowadays, members of CPT and Operation Dove carry two cameras when they go out. "One camera protects the other camera," Ciaghi says. "I bring my camera everywhere. When you're in Tuwani, you're always on alert."

However, internationals are still much less likely targets for attack than villagers—and therefore, they make ideal candidates for accompanying farmers and schoolchildren on a daily basis. Accompaniment makes up most of the daily work for members of CPT and Operation Dove, according to Schramm. They go into the fields with farmers and walk with shepherds as they tend their flocks. They also monitor the Israeli soldiers who now escort village children to and from school. If problems occur with settlers or soldiers, international accompaniers call the Israeli police, who are much more likely to respond to internationals than to Palestinians. In this way, the international presence creates a sort of "safety bubble," according to Ciaghi and Hereni.

Resistance From Inside—and From Afar

Though attacks have decreased greatly since the arrival of international peace groups, Hereni says, settlers continue their attempts to assault Tuwani, changing their methods to accommodate changing circumstances.

"Even with the organizations here accompanying people, settlers attack," Hereni says. "But now it's different, because they know they're being documented. Now they wear masks." So the solution is not simply to import enough internationals to intimidate the settlers into submission. In the face of continued violence, villagers play a key role in defending their own human rights.



Israeli military demolishes a house and toilets.

Many village leaders have undergone nonviolence training, and work to spread awareness about the history and theory of non-violent resistance. They also organize and participate in public demonstrations and protests. During such events, Tuwani residents often give testimony about the harassment they've suffered at the hands of settlers and soldiers. Some protests take place on the micro-level: they are the many small decisions villagers make every day in their efforts to survive in Tuwani.

"From organizing olive harvest projects and peaceful protests against the separation barrier to women simply going and sitting down beside men who have been detained, living is resisting," Joel Guldedge says. Beyond any blatant action of "protest," the people of Tuwani are constantly demonstrating for their rights, simply by staying in the village despite the loss of much of their land and the theft of their crops.

"Israeli settlers think that by taking away our food we will leave our land," says one of the elder women of Tuwani. "But we will eat the dirt. We will never leave our land."

Problems with settlers and soldiers in villages like Tuwani may seem a far-off problem—best dealt with on local terms, by villagers themselves and those internationals who commit to living among them. But the issues that impact Tuwani's circumstances are not confined to the boundaries of the village, or the South Hebron Hills, or Israel/Palestine, or even the Middle East. As Americans, we can play a part in pressuring Israel to address Palestinian welfare—and we may even have a responsibility to do so.

According to a 2006 study by the World Policy Institute, the United States has provided more financial aid to Israel than it has to any other country for the past 30 years, and U.S. aid makes up 20 percent of Israel's military budget. Most of the Israeli military's weapons are provided by the United States. Our tax dollars also provide fuel for Israel's bombs and military vehicles. Thus, we maintain a relationship with the Israeli soldiers who harass and neglect Palestinians in villages like Tuwani—whether we like it or not.

How to counteract this unintentional involvement? One straightforward tactic is to fuel your cash into peaceful resistance by giving to groups like CPT, Operation Dove, Ta'ayush and Amnesty International. Ciaghi also suggests putting your mouth where your money is—or engaging other people's mouths to do so—by spreading the word about crises like those occurring in Tuwani, and inviting CPTers to speak in your community. She adds that Americans can commit to direct action without traveling to Palestine: subscribe to CPT's email list, so you'll be available for its urgent-action calls. These occur only a few times a year, but they're instances in which American voices can echo very powerfully. For example, in October 2005, a Palestinian gun machine shot at a group of Israeli settlers near Bethlehem, far from Tuwani. Three of these settlers were from Ma'on, the settlement near Tuwani, so Tuwani's villagers were a natural target for Ma'on's anger (though they did not play a part in the attack). Ma'on leaders threatened assaults on the village, and warned the internationals living in Tuwani to leave. Israeli soldiers backed the settlers' warnings, urging all international activists to leave before settler attacks began.

Instead of leaving, CPT sent out an urgent-action email, asking its American allies to call Israeli officials and ask the army to protect Tuwani. Officials were flooded with several hundred phone calls. Soon after, the army sent a unit to maintain a constant protective presence in Tuwani for two days, and the settlers never attacked.

As internationals, Israelis, villagers and activists worldwide build a larger and stronger peace movement in the South Hebron Hills, settlers are finding it harder to attack and soldiers are becoming more accountable for protecting Palestinians. Nevertheless, it's slow work.

"I see that things have changed for the better in South Hebron," Hasenfratz says. "It has become more difficult to sustain the occupation in this area. I dream of a day when Palestine will be free. And I believe that until that day, we have to help the people hold onto their land." ☺

11:50 a.m. I ride the escalator to the roof garden.

11:52 a.m. I walk past the lunching urban professionals and over to the building's edge: Sixty feet below throbs San Francisco's main artery, Market Street.

11:53 a.m. My partner, Kate, hauls out a 50 meter climbing rope from my backpack; she ties one end around a building pillar as I attach my climbing harness to the other. A few people notice us—they look and whisper; someone points. Security is coming. Thirty seconds.

Climbers typically fall backwards over a building's edge, free-falling a foot before their climbing system catches them. The weakest point in any climbing system is the human spine, which, on static ropes like mine, can withstand a free-fall of six feet before it fractures, 12 feet before it snaps.

It's a simple fall, but it's my make-or-break point. Just as an activist must have faith that they can achieve social change in the face of great odds, even while facing entrenched beliefs and powerful opponents that benefit from the status quo, climbers must believe their system will support them. If I had continued to doubt my equipment, and allow the intoxicating cocktail of fear and adrenaline to overwhelm me, I would have been removed from the team.

Everything's simpler on the other side. I ignore the fish-eye view of San Francisco's streets and focus on the details—tying knots, hauling ropes, and communicating via walkie-talkie with my fellow climber, who is hanging about 40 feet adjacent to me, so we can unfurl our banner for the swelling crowd and TV crews below.

Our target is the Wells Fargo Bank; our goal is to convince people to close their accounts and bank elsewhere (such as a credit union) because Wells Fargo funds old growth logging, and domestic oil and coal mining. We want Wells Fargo to fund sustainable projects, to actually "fund the future," which is their campaign's slogan. Our message is conveyed by our banner, which says "Wells Fargo: Lootin' and Polluting' since 1852," as well as by activists who are mingling in the crowd, talking to the public and the media, handing out leaflets, and identifying potential active-supporters of the campaign.

The consequences of direct action are frequently profound, often uncontrollable. Some direct actions galvanize the imagination, and catalyze social evolutions: in 1971, a group of activists risked their lives by sailing to the site (nearly Alaska) of a US-planned underground nuclear bomb test. The activists were arrested and removed and the bomb detonated, but the action birthed, Greenpeace, a fervent anti-nuclear movement and a realization amongst the industrialized world that nature mattered. This is our hope.

As always, the police arrive. They lean over the edge and shout to me to climb up. I tell them I'm busy. They motion to me with their fingers imitating a scissor-like motion that they're going to cut the rope. This is our fear.

It is my team member Kate's responsibility to protect me. Kate's father is the Catholic Priest, Phil Berrigan, who advocated



HANGING IN THERE

WHEN YOU'RE 100 FEET OFF THE GROUND
AND DANGLING FROM A ROPE,
CALLING FOR CHANGE

MEANS HAVING A STRONG SPINE
by Jessica Bell

THE GOVERNMENT IS SYSTEMATICALLY
ISOLATING,
MARGINALIZING, AND TERRORIZING
THOSE THAT ENGAGE IN TACTICS
THAT FALL OUTSIDE
THE STATE-PRESCRIBED MEANS
OF SOCIAL CHANGE.

for a nuclear-free peaceful world. Phil's first protest was in 1967, where he poured his blood on selective service records in criticism of the Vietnam War. His final action occurred in 1999 where he symbolically spiritually-cleansed nuclear warheads. He was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison, rounding out his total time in prison to 11 years. He died of liver cancer a year after his final release. It is this defiance that the owners of this industrialized society fear, that conviction that one's internal moral code must be upheld regardless of the consequences. It is a mindset that overthrows governments.

Kate shouts down to me that the police are arresting her. I'm alone.

Like activism itself, the biggest risk to climbers is not the equipment; it's people. A friend's partner, Martin Shaw, was an experienced activist who participated in a climbing blockade action in Evian, France—in protest of the June 2003 Group of Eight (G8) Summit. The G8 Summit is a yearly meeting where representatives of the world's richest eight countries gather to decide how they want to drive the machine of our unsustainable and unjust industrial society. According to Aubonnebridge.net, a website hosted by Martin Shaw and allies, "Thousands of people came to protest against the undemocratic, unaccountable and elitist "global leaders" and their politics."

The action involved blockading a bridge that had to be crossed by G8 delegates traveling by car from the Geneva airport to the G8 summit's location in Evian. In essence, by blockading this bridge, and thus the passage of the delegates, the activists were stalling the proceedings of the G8 meeting itself. The activists blocked the road by stretching a climbing rope across the width of the bridge. Two climbers, Martin Shaw and Gesine Wenzel, attached themselves to the rope's ends and hung over opposite sides of the bridge, 65 feet above the ground, counterbalancing each other, one life-anchor each. By stretching a rope across the width of the bridge, the activists were effectively stopping traffic because if cars tried to cross the bridge they would damage, move or potentially break the rope, which stopped the suspended activists from falling a potentially lethal distance to the riverbed below.

The action stopped traffic across the bridge. By the time the police arrived, there was a mile of backed up idle traffic behind the rope. With the police's arrival, the atmosphere collapsed into chaos. The agitated police shouted and physically assaulted the supporting activist that were standing on the bridge between the rope bearing the lives of Martin Shaw and Gesine Wenzel and the cars. The police ripped up the activist group's hand-held banner that read "Stop or You Will Kill Two People." The supporting activists grew desperate and created a temporary blockade by lying down on the road in front of the life-bearing rope in the hope of stopping the cars from advancing and damaging the rope, and thus threatening the lives of Martine and Gesine. The supporting activists were forcibly removed by the police. Video footage shows three policemen looked over the side of the bridge and down at Martin Shaw as he swung, suspended by the climbing rope, 65 feet

above the Aubonne River. Martin waved at the police.

Direct actions like this are the canary in the coalmine of government repression because it always comes down to a simple choice: a human life or business as usual. The value of each is influenced by factors—the activists' ethnicity, the political strength of the citizenry and the presence of media. Each time the climber waits in space, drifting and twisting in the wind, waiting until the drama is played out and the decision is made.

When Martin felt the rope move he asked his assistant, who was standing on the bridge, why. But his assistant didn't answer him. She was screaming.

During his fall Martin thought, "Oh my god, they cut the fucking rope." As reported by the United Kingdom's Guardian newspaper, he later said, "It was such an unfathomable possibility that my reaction was just one of acknowledged astonishment." This was one of those still rare occasions when governmental authorities attempted to assassinate two white activists engaged in televised civil disobedience in an industrialized country.

Martin collapsed, feet first, onto the rocky bed and shallow stream, entangled in rope. He tried to hold his head and body out of the water. As some activists rushed to help him, the others rescued and hauled up his climbing partner, Gesine Wenzel, onto the bridge. Martin was taken to hospital by helicopter in critical condition. He pelvis was broken, his back damaged, his feet smashed, and his spleen ruptured. Four months later he was released from the hospital with a hospital bill of \$30,000. He will never regain full mobility and is in frequent pain. In 2004, Martin and Gesine were found guilty of blocking the road and endangering the life of the car drivers, receiving suspended prison sentences. The policemen who cut the rope, Michael Deis and Claude Brutin were taken to court on lesser charges of bodily harm through negligence. The pair were declared not guilty by Swiss Judge Brutin on July 17th, 2006.

Fellow rescued climber Gesine Wenzel declared the experience as not an isolated incident. "Supposedly democratic governments are giving the green light for their police forces to use lethal levels of violence against people daring to exercise their rights to denounce the economic injustice of institutions like the G8."

The US Government is not frequently assassinating white activists . . . yet. But the government is systematically isolating, marginalizing and terrorizing those that engage in tactics that fall outside the state-prescribed means of social change.

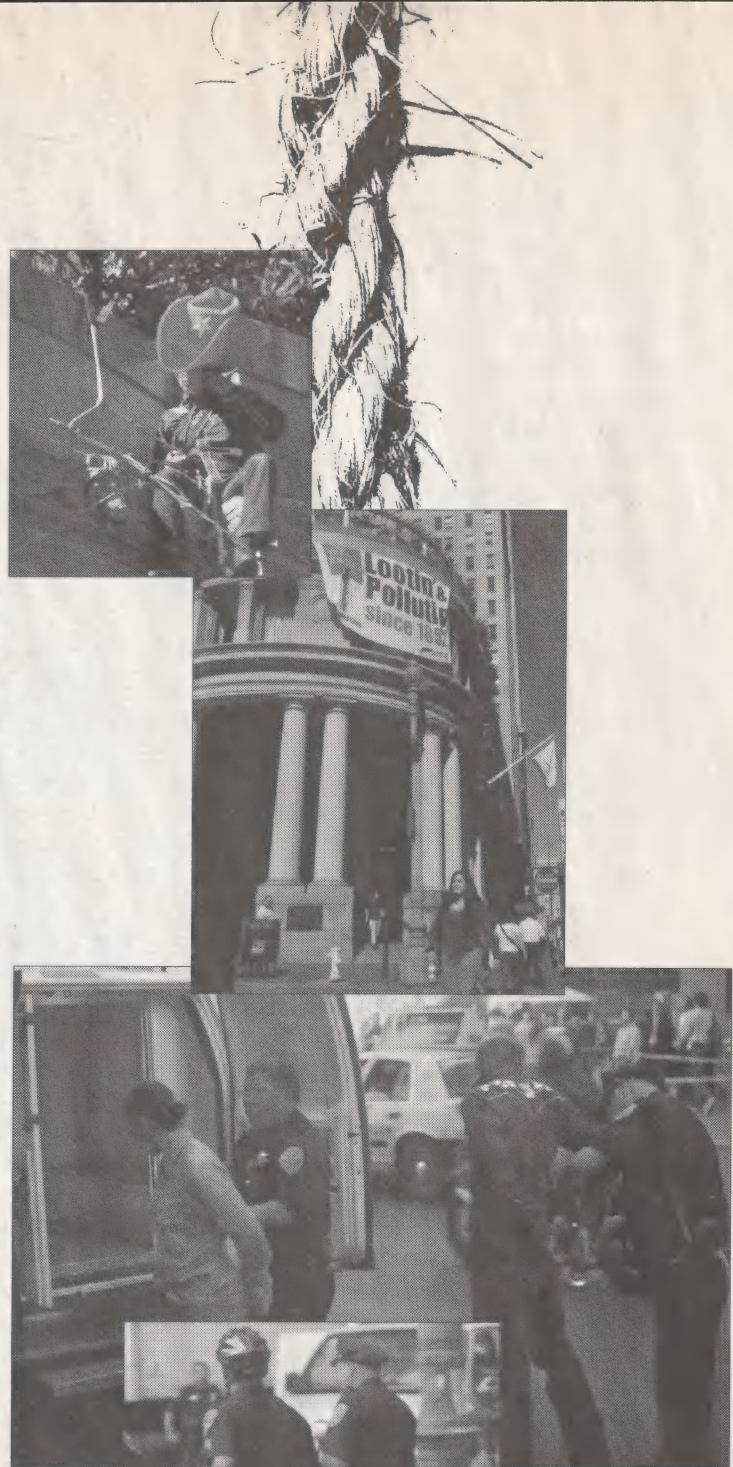
Defined as the "Green Scare," over the past year, over 12 people have been charged for allegedly engaging in the destruction of businesses engaged in environmental and animal abuses—from ski resorts to housing developments. The charged are facing prison sentences of up to 10 years in prison, despite no instances of injury or death to humans.

In gross violation of the First Amendment Constitutional right to free speech, in September 2006, six activists that were part of an effective campaign to shut down animal testing hunting facility, Huntingdon Life Sciences, were sentenced to one to six years in prison for multiple felonies, including conspiracy to harass using a telecommunications device, interstate stalking, and violation of the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, which bans anyone from physically disrupting an animal enterprise, such as an animal testing facility. What these activists did was manage the public component of the "Stop Huntington" campaign (the website, public speaking, a newsletter and emails), encouraging people to get involved using both through legal, confrontational and verbally aggressive forms of advocacy (for instance, raucous demonstrations outside Huntingdon employees' homes) and illegal forms of advocacy (destruction of property owned by Huntingdon and its customers). The campaign website also published anonymous reports of illegal activity against the targeted company. The terrorists were never charged with committing property destruction themselves, nor with endangering or harming another individual. Their true crime, one suspects, is their effectiveness; Huntingdon Life Sciences teeters on the brink of bankruptcy, as a result of the activists' international boycott campaign.

Edgy non-profit organizations, Greenpeace and Rainforest Action Network (RAN), are undergoing intrusive government surveillance and harassment, and, in the case of RAN, the House Ways and Means Committee is threatening to remove their tax-exempt status for RAN's involvement in civil disobedience.

My action takes place in the liberal hub of San Francisco. As is anticipated, the system is remarkably accommodating of my behavior. Once the TV crews have gone, I climb back up and am arrested; one of the police officers tells me and my fellow climber that we remind him of his daughter. My charges are dropped the following week.

I think, as we delve further into this era defined by the global climate crisis and growing resource scarcity, that this country's power-holders will be tempted to continue to repress activists. But the power-holders response to social change will also depend upon us, on how strong our movements for social change become, and the strength of our solidarity for those that engage in different strategies and tactics, particularly those that are more radical or confrontational. I imagine that governments wouldn't be as willing to dole out significant prison sentences if Oprah Winfrey and Moveon.org opposed such tactics. And confrontational tactics and radical visions help more mainstream institutions move their more incremental agenda forward—which is also absolutely critical because we're all hanging on that rope. ☺





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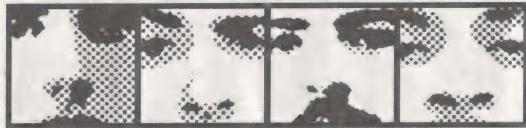
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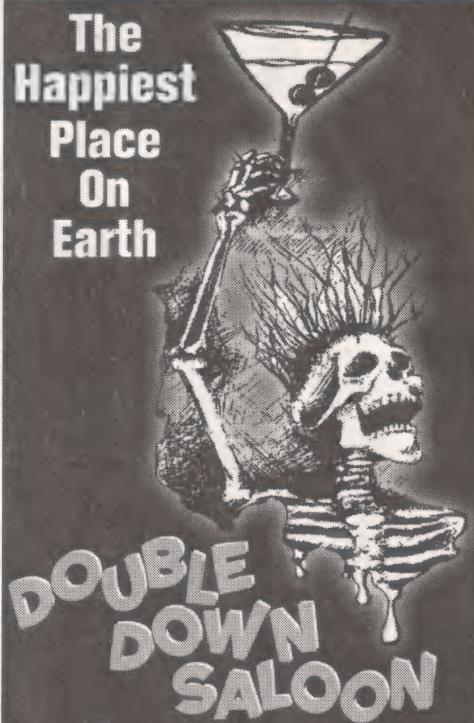
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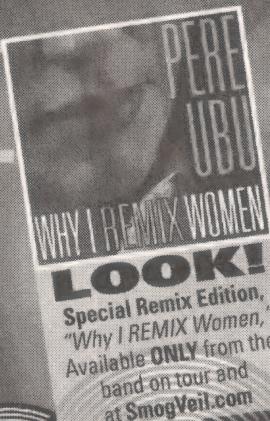
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Hand Smoke, Bang, Lemon, Ulberts, Squatwad, Blitze
Hire Under Squatwad's "80s & 90s", comp Volume 1 and
Unknown Instructors and The New Chums

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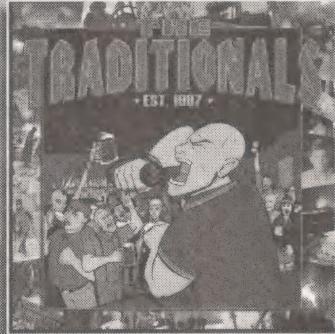
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national punk zines coming out regularly and it very quickly became a two-party system, *MRR* and us. Not long after, *HeartAttack* started up and we were three. When there were so few options, it was pretty easy to establish yourself. It came down to publishing regularly more than the quality of what you were printing.

Not to say we didn't have heart, we were all just so young and a few years away still from jaded and cynical—and polished. I learned my chops doing this thing. I met almost every one of my musical heroes. I found love, community, education, and true guts here. I wrote and designed a thousand pages.

I lived in Boston, Dan in Chicago. I'd be drinking wildly and we'd work until 5 in the morning to make deadline. We'd talk on the phone every half hour to make sure the files I was emailing him were arriving. This was on dial up, sucker, your cable Internet phone text message Tivo bulk package was years away still.

We'd finish up, and I'd fall into bed next to my dog, George. Up I'd be at 7 to get to work downtown.

My office was my bedroom, my desk I found on the street. My chair was surrounded by proofs and printouts an inch thick on the floor, as well as mountains of dirty laundry, empty beer bottles, and hundreds of records and CDs. It was an old house inherited by my bipolar lesbian roommate. My rent was nothing. This helped make up for the windows so drafty if you stood next to them in the winter your hair would blow.

BUILDING SKYSCRAPERS IN THE BASEMENT

I started working on *Punk Planet* when I was in art school around 1994. We were feisty, but not very good. Back then there were few na-

Every issue was better than the previous one. We got picked up by a distributor, Mordam. With Mordam came more sales, and regular checks. Some other zines were coming up as well. I moved to Chicago and I was getting paid a little bit. Soon all the buzz among bigger zines and record labels was who was getting office space. Zines done in bedrooms were now paying, getting equipment, offices, and referring to their "staff." The underground was exploding. Punk was being documented properly, like it never had before. And those documents didn't look like photocopied shit anymore.

We were, of course, doomed.

As the ancient proverb states; mo money, mo problems. *Punk Planet* got an office and new computers and new stuff but I was still working a full time job and just burned out. The end was unlovely, sorry Dan. (I was young!) Off I went with my new girlfriend and George to California, then here to Portland. In the meantime the slide began—people were turning to the Internet and print was on the decline. It was gradual, and from the top down: big corporate fish wraps were losing sales, but the underground figured it would never happen to us—even though, I suspect, many of us were buying fewer magazines and instead opting for the flashy, spinning gizmos of the web.

All the while we were all printing and reading articles about the big business consolidation of media, and rocking out to "5 Corporations" by Fugazi, a song about the fact that five multinationals controlled almost all the media in this country.

Grows so smoothly, Moves so slowly, Takes completely, It's as if they belong and they've been here all along, This one's ours let's take another, Check the math here, check in ten years, Clusterfuck theory buy them up and shut them down, Then repeat in every town...

California sucked so we moved to Portland and launched *Herbivore* magazine on ancient equipment, with dial up, in my spare bedroom. But instead of DIYing the distro, I convinced

Big Top Distribution, who would later become Indy Press Newsstand Services, to pick us up. They were hesitant but believed in me so our first issue was on the newsstand alongside *Time*, *Mother Jones*, and *Cat Fancy*. It cost us a fortune to print all those magazines and we weren't going to be paid for any sales for at least a year. But I felt like what we were trying to say was worth it, and worth the fact that we were relying heavily on corporate bookstores to spread my message for me—corporate bookstores I wished didn't exist? *Clamor*, *Mother Jones*, *Bitch*—all my favorites—were on Big Top. It felt right, despite the fact that I knew I was going to amass tremendous debt and didn't really understand the business of newsstand sales enough to figure out if we'd ever make money.

We trudged on though, got an office, got a big fucking monitor and a G5, worked hard, all of that. Got a lot of great response about the magazine, turned a lot of people on to animal rights with our "this movement doesn't suck like you think it does" approach. Barnes and Noble sold a few magazines, but never as many as we wanted. Same with Borders and Tower. The downward trend in magazine sales, industry wide, continued. Indy Press eventually started slipping in payments. We went through four reps in three years. All the while those big corporate bookstores making money off us indie publications didn't seem concerned enough to offer better payment terms to help us, even when we started wobbling and falling over. Jason from *Clamor* and I joked once that we were basically paying Barnes and Noble to throw magazines away for us and why didn't we save the shipping costs and walk them out to the dumpster ourselves. It was funny. Maybe you had to be there.

As you know, Indy Press folded late last year and other storms have battered independant publishing, sinking some great magazines like *Kitchen Sink*, *Lip*, *StayFree*, and *Clamor*. More will fall. Why? Money and the hassle of the newsstand business.

And here is where I lose all my publishing friends:

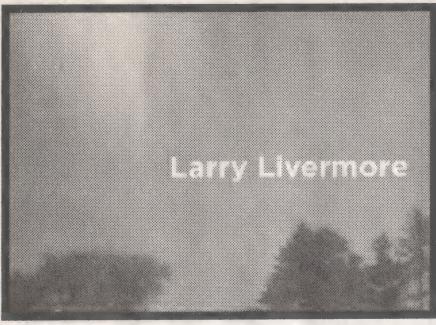
What the fuck is wrong with us? We were born in our bedrooms and did it for the love and now that the corporate media we always hated finally killed itself—corporate media we happily jumped into bed with because we "needed to be heard," or more disgustingly, deserved to be heard—we're throwing up our hands and quitting? We just can't go on without that shitty 40 percent of the cover price (after shrinkage) from B&N? That 30 percent sell through from Borders was our lifesblood? Those assholes can kill our message? Those assholes killed independent publishing? If it was that easy, we got what we deserved.

And here is where I lose all my potential readers:

What the fuck is wrong with you? Get off the fucking Murdoch-owned MySpace and start supporting independent voices—that is if you want them around. And very quickly get over the fact that you've been getting everything you want for free on the Internet. These projects cost money and getting an article done and putting it online takes just as much effort and has just as much value as printing it. I'm as guilty as anyone, and most things on the web aren't worth paying for, but if you were once paying for it in print, pony up when indie voices start publishing online.

Finally.

Where is the creativity that launched this whole movement? Where is the community? Doesn't the flame still burn? Did we really let a broken-down, corporate monopolized industry we have very little voice in shut us up? Was it so awful ten years ago when we had shitty computers but unfadeable hearts? Was it so awful that doing it ourselves again, maybe in our bedrooms, is, literally, a fate worse than death?



Larry Livermore

THE RICHARD DAWKINS DELUSION

A journalist interviewed Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, a few years before the evolutionary biologist-turned-polemician became

quite so famous. What was he like, I asked? "He seemed like he was having a spiritual crisis."

That sounded about right. You don't go on a jihad against god if you're at ease with yourself and your place in the universe. It's like the teenager who tells you how much his parents suck: the more he goes on about it, the more important you can assume those parents mean to him. Am I dismissing Dawkins as a petulant adolescent who's discovered that he can get a rise out of adults by shouting, "There's no god and Christians are stupid, neener neener"? Well, yes, but there's also a fundamentalist aspect to his down-with-god crusade.

Like Christian, Muslim, or Hindu fanatics convinced that their bizarre views are self-evidently true, Dawkins takes it as given that he alone is viewing things clearly and rationally, that it's everyone else who is deluded or nuts.

Dawkins gets taken more seriously than he should because he's achieved recognition in another (largely unrelated) field. It's a common misconception: Chomsky makes a name for himself in linguistics and suddenly he's an expert on geopolitics, Bono sells a few million records and the next thing you know he's running for president of Africa.

If you don't see a problem with Dawkins turning scientific credentials into theological ones, try reversing the equation. What happens when Biblical scholars make pronouncements about evolutionary biology? They're ridiculed—and rightly so—as crackpot creationists.

Dawkins isn't judged so harshly for his uninformed yammerings because these days—at least among the literati—science is more highly regarded than religion. It's understandable; science gives us jet planes and computers and cures for once-fatal diseases, while religion gives us . . . well, it's a bit nebulous, isn't it?

But while science excels at producing *stuff*, things that actually work in useful and predictable ways, it falls down badly when straying into the territory religion has staked out for itself, that of explaining the origin and purpose of life.

Not that religion offers definitive answers. We can laugh, for example, at various creation myths, whether it's god snapping his fingers and saying "Let there be light," or the world being balanced on the back of a giant turtle.

But what is science's alternative? The Big Bang? A giant explosion (and the stuff that exploded came from . . . ?) fills the universe with dust and moonbeams that somehow settle into stars

and planets and the billions of life forms inhabiting them? That's about as plausible as some old guy sitting on a cloud and breathing the world into being out of thin air.

Science—or Richard Dawkins as the self-appointed Voice Of Science—is as ignorant as any priest or witch doctor about how the world began, why it exists, or where it is headed. The difference is that some religious people—the honest, sincere and thoughtful ones—are willing to admit their ignorance, whereas Dawkins mounts the pulpit to pour derision and scorn on anyone who doesn't share his devoutly held convictions.

An intelligent person can come down on either side of the god question—or switch sides several times in response to changing circumstances and information. Just as most young people need to rebel against established political and social institutions, it's a rite of passage to "discover" that there's no god, that everything they've been taught about religious and spiritual matters is wrong.

Some return to their original faith—often in a stronger, more realistic form for its having been tested. Others find a new one, and many, perhaps most, settle into a vague, reasonably comfortable uncertainty. What's being taught by the various religions doesn't make sense for them, at least not enough to buy the whole package, but they'll admit there's probably "something" out there bigger than they can understand.

But there are those—the Taliban and Richard Dawkins among them—who can't live with uncertainty. They tolerate no doubts or challenges to their authority, whether wielded on behalf of god or against him. The Taliban flourished in a backward, depressed society, but how, you ask, does a prodigiously talented scientist like Dawkins devolve into a monomaniacal crank? I suspect, based on my own experiences as a born-again atheist (though not, sadly, as a prodigiously talented scientist), that it's largely a matter of ego. Ego, and insecurity.

I lack Dawkins's educational and professional credentials, but I was his equal in one respect: an overweening regard for my own brilliance. I was so clever, in fact, that I was deeply offended by the notion that someone, somewhere might be smarter.

I didn't claim to be the world's leading expert on nuclear physics or quantum mechanics or old Saxon languages or double-entry bookkeeping. I knew next to nothing about those subjects and dozens if not hundreds of others. But while others possessed greater expertise in specific areas, no one, I was sure, had a better grasp of the Big Picture.

My megalomania arose from smoking copious amounts of pot; I don't know what Dawkins's excuse is. I was one of those hippies who believed that marijuana produced a heightened understanding of the universe when my cosmic consciousness consisted mainly of my brain revolving around itself.

Unimpeded self-obsession expands to fill the space available, and when it comes bumping up against the concept of god, something has to give. In my case there wasn't room for two Supreme Beings. One of us had to go, and it wasn't going to be me. I suspect this is pretty much where Dawkins is coming from.

Eventually Dawkins will run into a situation he won't be able to think or glibly argue his way out of. Or maybe not, but that's what happened to me. I had to be brought down a few pegs to be willing to accept that I wasn't the center of the universe after all. Surprisingly, I found this a more comfortable place to be. The Smartest Guy In The World is a tough role to uphold, especially when you're operating mainly on bombast and bluster.

Dawkins would argue that it's not about ego, that he's taking up arms against god and religion because they do so much harm. But by that logic, science, which has provided us with nuclear warfare, global warming, and the technology of oppression and exploitation, should have a similar place on Dawkins's hit list.

There are two things you need to know about god, a wise man once told me: one, that there is a god, and two, that you ain't it. You can probably skip the first if you're willing to accept the second, but that might be a step too far for the very-pleased-with-himself Mr. Dawkins.

If, however, you still feel the need to immerse yourself in the Dawkins ethos, I suggest you spare yourself the time and the eyestrain by digging out your Bad Religion CDs—anything from the classic *Suffer/No Control/Against The Grain* era will do—and let the polysyllabic rantings of Greg Graffin wash over you. It's quicker, catchier, more pleasant, and you can dance to it.



Al Burian

I knew a man once who handled the problem of dressing himself in the following manner: he'd wear his clothes for two weeks straight, then go to a thrift store and buy the cheapest replacements he could find for every item he was wearing. He'd spend, on average, about two dollars, and he'd look hideous, clownish, outrageous, sometimes. At other times he would actually pull off a pretty good outfit. Either way, two weeks later the clothes would be dirty and wrinkled, and then he'd trade them in for another set. The two dollars always seemed like a worthwhile investment on the day when he'd appear shiny and new.

I liked the idea: assuming that the thrift store would take his old outfits and wash and re-sell them, the resultant system was a de facto clothes library. Or, more accurately, you could say he was renting instead of owning. A dollar a week is, if you think about it, not a bad rate for an unlimited and ever-changing wardrobe selection. But it was the selection which plagued him: never knowing what he'd look like next, a septuagenarian NRA member or a nu metal acid casualty—it was a nerve-wracking uncertainty, and

all that variance wore him down. He would describe his dream world, a utopia where everyone wore the same interchangeable navy-blue outfits, made from coarse, durable fiber. In this utopia people would exchange their pants and shirts with an identical set of pants and shirts every two weeks. The concept of ownership and social caste would be entirely removed from this clothing equation; we'd all relate to one another as equals, and I'd realize as he was describing it that these were the harsh dormitory lighting conditions of eastern block communism, and I'd wonder if all utopias must by necessity include this monotonous wardrobe, if freedom always comes at the price of drab interchangeability.

People are always talking about how great it is to own things, but that doesn't make much sense to me. You're getting scammed paying rent, they say, when you could be putting that money into a mortgage and end up owning the place. Ownership is always assumed to be the fairer, more humane option, the natural state of things, although to me the natural state of things seems much closer to rental. Ownership just seems like a month-to-month agreement with a more celestial landlord, and when the hands of fate decree that the washer and dryer you've just paid off should now explode and fill the basement you own with scalding, soapy sludge, it's time to pay rent to the forces of entropy. Ownership is an illusion against death: I'm wearing my favorite shirt right now, and the act of wearing it is crushing me, because I know that every second I wear it, I am wearing it away, and one day closer to wearing it out. This is heartbreaking, unbearable, and it is the pain of attachment which will bind me to it, until it's worn away, until I have destroyed it—knowing the whole time that I should take it off, right now, and go down to the thrift store to trade it in for whatever I can get.



ALLISON WOLFE

On with the show!
My Ladyfest Brisbane tour diary, continued...

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24
— BRISBANE

So no eight am radio show appearance, cuz we just can't move, sorry folks!

And no practice today for Jack's birthday off. We later stop by Ladyfest Nadia's house to see Sarah Dougher, who just flew in. The last time we saw her was at Ladyfest Midwest in Denver. Ladyfest brings ladies together! Then Angela and I took the City Cat boat down the river to South Bank. It's cheap like a bus, a great form of public transportation, with beautiful views. All cities with rivers should do this!

That night was the Chicks on Speed show. I'd never seen them before, so was really looking forward to it, but I was just beat to shit. It was interesting, the multi-media performance aspect and how well it worked with their songs. It was a smart, feminist,

performance art happening, very refreshing to the usual rock shows. But dude, their hand-made merchandise was like \$100! But I guess it's worth it.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25 – BRISBANE

That day I was on a panel “Ladyfest Past Present & Future: Still Agitating for Revolution Girl Style Now!” with Sarah Dougher and Oz political activist Liz Turner from Assassination Collective. It coulda benefited from some structure, but it was cool to be in a room full of punky feminists and get down to business talky-wise. Ladyfest to me is about indie feminists creating and participating in their own arts, entertainment, and community—a sort of cultural activism, as Sarah Dougher put it, in the form of an event, utilizing the mostly local talent and resources of women in one’s own community. I’ve been an organizer for two Ladyfests (Olympia 2000 and Washington DC 2002), but I’ve had the privilege of performing at many Ladyfests all over the place. I love going to each one and seeing how different ladies make things work in different places. It’s also just a really supportive and rare experience to attend a non-profit event featuring and organized by mostly or entirely women.

I was interested in hearing from the Scooter girls attending the panel. They put on a monthly indie queer girl event (called Scooter) in Sydney, and it’s totally amazing. Hawnay Troof played it the last time I was in Australia. At the time I’d heard some mutterings from some straight guys that they somehow felt alienated by or “not interested” in what Scooter was doing in Sydney, and it did feel like a pretty separate scene from the usual underground shows. It doesn’t aim to alienate straight guys (hey, it’s not always about you!), but rather to encourage people whose voices are usually ignored or stomped on.

After the panel a bunch of us cruised up the street to an alley where girls were skating off ramps and stuff. Angela wooed everyone by skating in a dress! Then we cruised out to our last practice with Jack before playing our first show. Nervous!

That night had Katy/Dear Nora, the Blow, and Sarah Dougher performing on this pretty lounge stage with a red velvet curtain backdrop. Very Sinatra. Katy looked stunning up there in her tall white suit and sunglasses. I had a good talk with the Dough between sets. She was telling me to go hang out with her in Portland. I’ve been thinking of moving there, and my lil’ sister Molly lives there, and I miss the West Coast. But then there’s the rain . . . Then Khaela from the Blow lit up the room in bright white. At that point I decided to try an Aussie beer at the bar, asking for a “Cooper’s green.” The bartender kept saying “huh?” and putting his hand to his ear. I repeated it over and over, then finally he went to the other guy working the bar and made him serve me instead. That guy was like “What do you want?” Was it my accent?! I was so embarrassed I just ran out the door and down the street to the other venue featuring Oz Ladyfest bands. Upon my return, I saw the cute guy hanging outside the door of the club. Cool. So I’m like, let’s go up and see Sarah Dougher play, and you can order the beer for the stupid tourist. As soon as we head up the stairs, I tripped on my too-big shoes and went flying on my face. Smooth.

After watching Sarah in her pigtails (do ya like how all’s I do is describe people’s appearance?!), we all ran up the street to catch Assassination Collective. They’re cool, old-school polit-punk. Then again, the never-ending search for the after-party. Half the crew ended up in a bondage club, but the rest of us were too cheap for the cover, so guess what? It’s Rick’s again! This time, you seriously couldn’t drag Angela away from the Galaga machine. Somehow we managed to pull another all-nighter. I swear, I usually can’t do it!

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26 – BRISBANE

Today we slept way in, and I’m feeling it hardcore. It’s the last night of Ladyfest, and we’re finally gonna play! Up to that point we’re all talk. The show was at the weird Powerhouse jazz club theatre space—fancy, but the sound guy hated us all! While Kiosk was playing, he totally went up on stage and just turned Angie’s guitar amp almost off. It’s the only melodic instrument in the band and her mean guitar style is essential to their sound. He was so rude and called them names even. But somehow I didn’t catch all this at the time, so when we went on (as schoolies in our school-girl outfits!), I wasn’t prepared. We also only have guitar/drums/vocals, and the sound guy tried to make Angela turn her amp all the way down. When she didn’t, and believe me, it wasn’t loud, he turned my mic off! I couldn’t believe it! So you couldn’t hear the vocals either. What did I have to do with it??

So sure enough, we ended up at Rick’s after the show for one last hurrah. But it wasn’t the same with so many peeps already gone home. I don’t wanna think of Ladyfest as over. And I knew the organizers were dead tired. This time, we split that joint right before daylight and crashed immediately, knowing we’d have to get up early to pack and go to the airport, off to Melbourne . . .

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27 – BRISBANE (& MELBOURNE)

I’d been fast asleep in the living room for just an hour when at around five am I heard this pounding on the front door. I opened the door to find one of the Ladyfesters hysterical about something that had just happened. She came in and we all got up and gathered around. A friend of hers in the building next door (where she also lived) had just been assaulted by a man who broke into the woman’s apartment. The woman bravely fought back and did all the “right” things, managed to escape and went to this friend’s apartment to get help. Luckily, many supportive Ladyfesters were there to help deal with the situation. The cops came and things started getting crazy around there, with the media to follow.

It was so frightening and heartbreakening to hear what happened, to visualize it and to also see the anguish in the survivor’s friend’s face, to have it hit so close to home . . . and as a woman, to know that this is the kind of thing that happens to women all the time, anywhere, perpetrated by men in our society. I’ve always thought of violence against women as a given, like “when” will this happen to me, not “if” . . . It’s an epidemic that society rarely acknowledges. It was a nightmare ending to a glorious week of women celebrating women, a brutal reminder of another part of the reality of women’s lives. But hopefully at least we have the support of each other and the community to fight together. Clearly our struggles are far from over.



Elizabeth
Crane

THE SUPERFICIAL TRI- ANGLE OF HAPPINESS

A little over ten years ago, I left New York worn down and in a state of despair about the entire world (a number of concerned friends at this time suggested

meds and firmly instructed me not to watch any more TV news), but vaguely hopeful about things turning around for myself at least, in Chicago. I formed a theory I called the Superficial Triangle of Happiness, a simple formula whereby acquisition of a dog, a tattoo, and short hair would result in my ultimate fulfillment. Just go with it. The word superficial is important here.

After 20 years of variations of the same long haircut, I finally set out to prove the theory by cutting my hair short. Never one to rush into anything (aside from ill-advised relationships and random, sudden cross-country moves) I came about the short hair gradually, a few inches at a time. Still, it remained for a good year or so at chin-level, and I did feel a bit elated by the considerable change. Shortly after this I got my first tattoo, which was even more of a rush, as those inked of you know, feeling, at age thirty-five, like my inner cool person was finally emerging from behind the bangs and the J Crew rollnecks.

Until a few weeks ago, I never got a dog.

When I mentioned this theory to my husband, he said, Hm. Sounds like you had no follow-through. Which I hadn't thought of. I contemplated this for a moment, because I did have a history of not following through on things, particularly things that actually mattered, like meaningful work or relationships with men who returned my feelings.

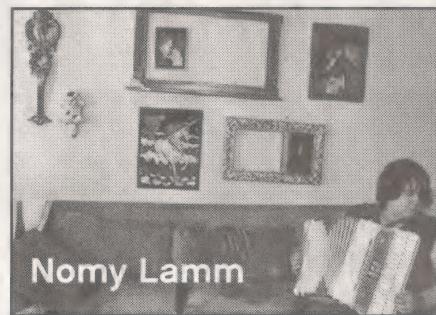
As it turned out, in this case, I did follow through on something. I got happy. Looking at it now, in some ways it seems almost accidental. I was mostly seeking not to be unhappy. Either way, it's not an overnight success story, by any means. It's rather a long grisly story, and suffice it to say it involved a lot of hard work, therapy, support, and a brief infatuation with the self-help section of my local indie bookstore. (I got over it.) It was the opposite of superficial. It was deep. Yo.

Anyway, so now, many years after the formulation of this thesis, we have this awesome dog, but I was already happy when we got it, so I can't entirely disprove my theory, but as it turns out, taking proper care of a dog is kind of fucking hard work, a huge lot of work; certainly worth all the rewards, but multiply this hard work if it's a big dog. In my original plan, the dog was, in no uncertain terms, going to be a pug. So certain that I declared these intentions to anyone who'd listen and listen they did, because my home soon became a veritable pug museum, a Spencer Gifts away from home. I attained no doubt as much or more pug stuff than any self-respecting person

who actually has a pug. Percy, who came from the Catahoula rescue, currently weighs fifty-two lbs, and like me, enjoys sleeping a lot. But he also enjoys running, jumping, chewing, biting, and eating things that aren't food, and he does not enjoy bathing at all, and so guess what he smells like? A dog. Training is slow, and I'm grateful to have someone to share that detail, but I can't help but recall a time in my life when I believed in all honesty that god might be punishing me (mostly with regard to why god only sent me bad boyfriends), considering that at no time in the weeks since Percy came home has it risen above twenty degrees for a period longer than 24 hours, and in fact, it has mostly been well below that, today's high hovering around minus three. Which is to say that clad in two pairs of long johns and my dirty old pre-triangle down jacket, it is not pleasant going outside for any reason, much less a long, playful, romp, not to mention that under these conditions you cannot bear witness to two-thirds of the cuteness of the triangle.

My hair, though long again (frankly, less maintenance for me than short, which is key), is looking really good these days, and I now have two tattoos, both visible only in the summer.

Of course, we love this dog. When I heard, after we'd brought him home, of how imminent his demise had been, I burst into tears. I worry about this dog when I go out and leave him alone, I worry about him when we go out together, and I worry whether I'll ever be fit to parent a child if caring for a dog is this hard. We're supposed to go on our first trip away from him since he came home, and all possibilities for dog care seem inadequate, even the poshest of dog hotels (oh yes), which is out of our budget anyway. I'm sure my separation anxiety will be as bad or worse than his. So if there's a case to be made, I'd still speculate that the superficial triangle may lead to happiness mixed with fear, anxiety, and worry. Which is kind of the deal with or without a dog anyway, right?



I'm icing my neck.
I hope this helps.
Last night I went to
synagogue to watch
my mom sing in the
choir and ran into
my friend Eden.
Eden lives in my old
apartment, the one
I lived in for years
before I moved to

Chicago. I met him a few months after moving back to Olympia, after returning from a 10-day silent meditation retreat. I was at Yom Kippur services with my mom when she pointed him out. "That guy is very knowledgeable about the kabbalah," she told me.

I approached him in the lobby at the end of the day. "My mom says you know about kabbalah. Maybe we can hang out some time." And so it began.

Last night sitting in the pew next to him, singing along with

the choir, I felt a siblingish energy with him. We laughed and pointed things out and grooved to our wordless melodies. These months of meeting weekly to study tarot and kabbalah and discuss our healing, creative, and mystical paths, we have begun to build something together that I've never had with a straight man. A real, deep, true friendship.

After services we went back to his place, my old apartment on the street with the traintracks. His friend came over. I guess that's where to start the story. That's what I was talking about. My neck. It's been hurting so bad. Eden's friend asked me what was wrong. With Eden's encouragement, I moved to the end of the couch and let his friend's big man fingers dig into my pain.

"Just let your head flop around," he told me. At the moment that he grabbed my head and cracked it to the side, I recall that I was debating how much I wanted to relax for him. *Do I want to let my head flop around for this man I don't know?* CRACK.

"How do you feel?" he asked after I shrunk back to my corner of the couch.

"I'm in shock." I smiled and tried to gather myself back in.

It hurts like hell today, but I'm still open to it having helped. I alternate ice and heat, giving love to the part of me that had to lose control. My neck. Cracked. My head. Grab. Crack. I process through my shock, going through all the mind games that often follow a traumatic event—*What could I have done to prevent it? Did I want it to happen? Is it OK?* Maybe something needed to get clear. Since that moment I have been surrounded by aggressive male energy that feels familiar but still surprising. What feels most clear is the sense of entitlement that makes men into active agents and leaves me feeling, regardless of my lifetime of work to empower myself, like an object of other people's will.

How do you change these dynamics? Is it possible to break through the wall of heterosexual male privilege and find a common ground that is not defined solely by men's sense of comfort and enjoyment? After spending hundreds of hours on the phone fulfilling men's fantasies, I pretty much know what it's about. I know what my uses are and which roles are available to me. I know where the boundaries are, and the real me is usually found just outside of them.

It's no wonder my mom hasn't re-entered the dating scene since leaving my dad five years ago. She'd rather be alone than not feel seen.

Maybe you know that I live with my mom, but I don't know if I've written anything about who she is. She is ageless, a little kid and an old woman, open and learning, wise and powerful. She can play whole songs by making her mouth into an "o" and flicking her cheeks, taking the drop-of-water sound effect—a trick she learned from her middle-school students—to a whole new level. She loves music, and when she's feeling well she goes to a Sunday morning meditative dance class. I went to it with her once and ended up rolling around on the floor with a woman I'd never met. It was strange and intimate and silly and completely non-sexual, like preschool or an acid trip.

One Sunday morning I woke up to find my mom returned from class and painting in the hallway.

"What are you doing?" I asked, seeing giant pink letters

through my door.

"I'm awake in my garden," she said excitedly, referencing a recent conversation we had about living our dreams.

At my end of the hall it read "I DANCE! ONLY FOR MYSELF." On a smaller section of wall she was working with the phrase "Pretty Is as Pretty Does," crossing it out and re-phrasing it, a look of concentration on her face.

"I've always been pissed off that my mom would say that to me," she explained, glaring at the words and adding flourishes with her paintbrush. "What you do should be an expression of who you are."

My mom plays a Chinese instrument called the *er hu*, talks to her cat, rents out her basement to Books to Prisoners, bakes bread, gardens, teaches science and math to seventh graders, and does anti-oppression work. She's one of the most interesting, involved people I know, and she is still lonely.

She needs companionship, she needs kindred spirits, allies, lovers, friends, cohorts. Not necessarily a man. Not necessarily romantic or sexual, but sweet. She's expressed interest in men, women, and transpeople, anyone who might be able to appreciate her and share time and space in a way that feels healthy and alive. I wish there was a way I could help her find somebody to love her, to bring the beauty of relationship to her life.

It's a few days later and my neck still feels painful but not agonizing. I keep doing my physical therapy exercises and stretching, aware there's something there that I have been avoiding. Oppression fucking eats you up no matter how hard you fight to resist it, it finds its way in. The way I cope is through my relationships, by building a fortress of love around me with people whose hearts I trust on the deepest levels. I know that the people I let in are doing their work not just to make someone else happy, not just for the fulfillment of their egos, but to be self-actualized and true to their mission and purpose in this world. To bring healing. To reverse the order of oppression, not so that someone else can be on top, but so that we can all share power.

Eden actually showed up for a conversation about gender dynamics and breaking down male privilege, and the conversation felt equal and real. We weren't playing roles and I didn't feel patronized or humored. I felt met.

I've had communication breakthroughs with half a dozen people in the past two weeks, working through walls of betrayal and rejection, hidden feelings, abandonment and control issues, and now gender dynamics. Mercury has been in retrograde, which usually means disintegration of communication, but I feel an opening, like a trap door that intentions can slip through, if they are true and strong and real.

So I want to use that trap door to send an intention out into the world. Just as my mom was able to identify Eden as a person who I should connect with, I want to return the favor. To bring into her life somebody who wants to know her, the real her.

If you are interested, or know someone who is, please visit mysmom.com and send her an email.

Happy Mother's Day.

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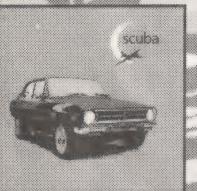


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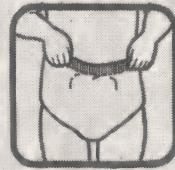
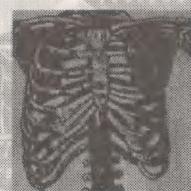
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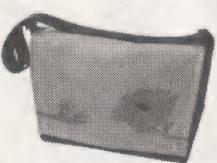
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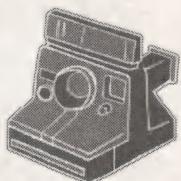
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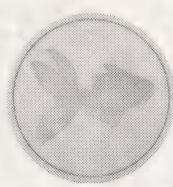
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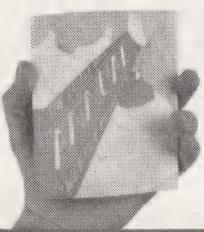
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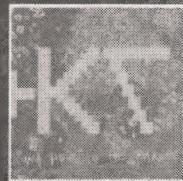
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Not Even the Zookeeper Can Keep Control

by Jonathan Messinger

The zoo acquired a man-eating wolf. It's a public-relations stunt, because too many passive animals at the zoo have recently died: an elephant, two giraffes, and a manatee. Peaceable animals that are supposed to outlive humans. The zoo acquired the man-eating wolf to reverse their karma and maybe to show they have a sense of humor. The wolf, so far, has not been fed a human, but rather mice. He is permitted to chew on the old bones of dead prisoners. He seems to like it.

Tourists go to the zoo and watch it from behind bulletproof glass. The wolf salivates at the sight of the onlookers, drool lolling from his jaws and now and again he points at the most frightened, as if ordering at a deli.

Attendance at the zoo is up.

Within a week, the zoo lost the man-eating wolf. It happened four days ago and the newspapers have to at least pretend to be serious. The best headline pun the news can come up with is off the Michael J. Fox movie: *Mean Wolf*.

"Is that the best they can do?" I ask you. You, sitting most often on the futon and reading the newspapers, feet on the coffee table. You ignore me. I sit down beside you and hand you a glass of orange juice. The air around you is hot like you just came out of the dryer. It's been days since we've touched.

The town is not handling well this news of the on-the-loose man-eating wolf. It's not so much the news, but the man eating. There was a public meeting the other day at the Second Congregational Church where the people of the town asked the zoo board of commissioners, "Why the fuck did you bring a man-eating wolf to our town?" And the zoo board of commissioners said, "Well, who the fuck let the man-eating wolf out because it wasn't us?" And then, because the public

meeting happened in a church, everyone in the church, in unison, asked, "Why the fuck did god make a man-eating wolf?"

"I think I love this wolf," you say. It's eight days since the wolf's escape and 35 people have turned up missing or as piles of bones. The math doesn't add up.

"How could you love something so destructive?" I ask.

"Because this wolf doesn't care if your heart is whole or not," you say. "It tastes just the same."

The air around you is cold like you've just been reanimated. You suggest making love but now I'm too afraid.

I find the zookeeper in Cove Park, crouched behind a bush, not too far from the gazebo. He looks beaten. His brown and gold uniform is torn and one of his eyes is so bloodshot I wonder if it could shoot a laser.

"Why are you hiding here?" I ask. It's nighttime. Neither of us should be here.

"I'm trying to get my wolf back," he says. He reaches below the bush and pulls out a mammoth harpoon, the kind usually rigged to a tall ship.

"Why not just use a gun?" I ask.

"I don't have a permit," he says, as though I've wounded him. It occurs to me then that the harpoon may have been stolen.

"I don't think people expect you to catch the wolf yourself," I say. "I don't know if they're blaming you anymore."

"Who are they blaming, then?"

"Right now it looks like god," I say.

"Yeah, that'll never last," he says, and sprints across the park, still in a crouch, as if bullets are tearing the air above his head, or his back has been broken. In the distance, we both hear a wolf howl, and the zookeeper swings and squirms, straightens up and trips over the roots of a tree. The harpoon fires and the spear bounces with an unsharpened thud

against the tree trunk. The thing is plastic. Watching the zookeeper groan on the ground next to his toy harpoon is so painful I laugh.

Ten days of the man-eating wolf rampage and some 233 people have been killed. How is this possible? Another meeting is called at the church. I go because who wouldn't go.

The high school principal, trying to pass himself off as a preacher, is at the helm this time. The zoo board is there, in the pews, as is everyone else that I've ever seen in the town, except for you and the zookeeper. Our town is now small enough to fit everyone in the pews.

"Man-eating wolves are not the problem," the principal says. "The fact that none of us can learn from our mistakes is the problem."

The zoo board hallelujahs, but they are the only ones.

"I for one think the wolf is teaching us a lesson," the principal says. "Maybe we need this wolf to thin the herd."

Even the zoo board is a little wary of hallelujahing that.

"I'm confused," I say, because no one else would. "If it's only one wolf, why are there 233 dead and more missing?"

The principal glares at me from atop the altar. He menaces.

"No one in the room," he bellows. "No one in the room get to know this man! Don't get close to him, because I'm sure he will pretty soon be eaten!"

I leave the church right away, because I am afraid the principal is able to summon the man-eating wolf at will, and the beast will burst through the church doors and devour me, bones and all. But even if that isn't the case, I would have left anyway, because what the principal said just wasn't cool.

I take a walk in the park, hoping to find the zookeeper again. It isn't that

hard, he's back behind the bush, with his plastic harpoon and tattered uniform. He looks even worse for the wear.

"Did you go to the meeting?" he asks.

I hunker beside him, behind the bush. I realize he's not alone back here. There's a woman with him. She's wild-eyed and smiling at me like I should know her. I notice that the zookeeper has his hand down her pants.

"It's a basic need," he tells me.

"You should be concentrating," I tell him.

"Don't judge," he says. "What did they say about me, at the meeting, at church?"

"Everyone's counting on you to find the wolf," I say. I walk away, leaving him there, shaking.

You won't come back with me to the gazebo. You want to stay in the house. You say you've heard enough about the wolf and it's time we started talking about something else. I try to tell you about the principal, how he said that the wolf would eat me, and that no one should get close to me. You laugh. A breeze blows through like something is leaving the room. You say you can hear the ocean, even though there's nothing but pavement outside our window.

Wolf cries are regular now. I hear them in mono. No one has actually seen the wolf since it escaped, but it's there. On my way to the church I steal some new sneakers. I've never stolen anything of value, but no one is working the store anymore, and I feel like running shoes are a good idea.

I walk through the center of town, trying to find the source of the howls, but the wolf is fast and I am slow. I make my way to the church, but nothing is happening yet. Bones are now piling and sprawling in the streets and alleys, now that even the streetcleaners are gone. Legions of

buzzards circle above. The sky has become a dismal fishbowl. The buzzards rarely swoop. The bones are always picked clean, which makes me wonder about the nature of this wolf. If the wolf is so insatiable, would he not take the heart and move on for more, his taste and hunger wrapping into one? If this wolf were passionate, he wouldn't nitpick.

I circle back to the church and get in just in time, just as the doors are being bolted shut. Inside people are drinking cocoa and eating goldfish crackers out of small snack bags. We look like refugees. No one has anything left to say. The principal is there, but he only glares at me, as if he's disappointed he couldn't summon the wolf to eat me. When it becomes clear no one has any new insight, we file out, silently.

I walk around Cove Park, don't go directly to the bush by the gazebo, where I'm sure the zookeeper is still awaiting his fate. I pass by hedgerow after hedgerow, and rose bushes and chainlink fences. I'm looking for prints. Or shit. One would think that a huge, man-eating wolf would have to leave huge prints or man-eating shits behind. I hear a wolf bay again, a lone voice in harmony with itself.

There's the zookeeper, lying on his side.

"I haven't slept in days," he says.

"Neither have I."

"If I don't find this wolf soon, it's going to kill me the old-fashioned way," he says.

The zookeeper and I both fall silent. I can hear both of our heartbeats, mine less regular than his, or vice versa. I think about what you said, about a heart being of the same quality when stripped of its mystical properties. But then, why hasn't the wolf come for the zookeeper, or for me? Another howl and his heartbeat is like radio static. I pick up his harpoon and

follow the sound. The zookeeper wants to follow me, I know he does, but he's in no condition.

I ditch the harpoon in a dumpster and walk the edges of town. The wolf is moving in a circle, ever closing. I hear his howl so deeply it's as if it's coming from my throat. I wonder why no one has thought of this before, to just follow the sound of the beast and snuff it where it stands. Or maybe they have, and that's why we haven't seen them again.

I see it. I know you don't want to hear what it looks like, you hoped that it wasn't going to make an appearance in this story, but I'm going to tell you anyway. It's disappointing. It's small. Its jaws are tight and its muscles lean but from this angle it looks no more dangerous than a housepet. It looks comfortable, cozy. Up close its bays are so loud that I hear them muffled, like I'm underwater. Its fur is the same brown of the zookeeper's uniform. You wouldn't believe it, but I can feel my heart stop when it turns to look at me. It makes me wonder if it really eats men, or if it simply scares them to death.

But no, it definitely eats men, because it's running after me, growling. The spit flying from its mouth skips on the pavement like gravel. I sprint in my new shoes, the soles of my sneakers squeaking. The wolf is behind me, I know it. I trip on something. I thought it was a root, or a crack in the sidewalk. But I realize it's a pile of bones. For some reason, these bones remind me of you. Of course they aren't your bones, because you're still here, in this story. But as I roll onto my side, staring at the crystallized end of a dismembered joint, I wondered if it's yours. And when the wolf, bearing down behind me, finally reaches for my chest, I wonder if my heart will taste different from yours. ☺

Jonathan Messinger is co-publisher of *Featherproof Books* and founder of The Dollar Store Reading Series. His collection of stories, *Hiding Out*, comes out in October.

DIY Competitive Scrabble

By Sara Abadi

I know what you're thinking: competitive Scrabble?! Believe it or not, competitive Scrabble has quite a following. According to the National Scrabble Association (NSA), there are over 300 official Scrabble clubs in the US and Canada and a Scrabble tournament each weekend all across the country. If you think Scrabble is just that game you play at miscellaneous family occasions after dinner, think again. With timed games, ESPN coverage of the national tournament, and cash prizes as high as \$25,000, this isn't the kind of Scrabble you played with Grandma last Thanksgiving. But it is a game at which anyone, with a little practice and commitment, can become competitive.

Getting Started

When first getting involved in competitive Scrabble, you might want to do a little research and see what you're getting into. Luckily, there are plenty of entertaining resources. Stefan Fatsis's book, *Word Freak*, documents some of the country's elite Scrabble players and gives readers an inside look at the competitive Scrabble world. *Word Wars*, a documentary that follows Scrabble players on the road to the National Scrabble Championship, features many of the same players as *Word Freak* and allows viewers to witness the drama and intensity of Scrabble tournaments.

Once you've done some light reading, or viewing, you're ready to get into the game. To be eligible for tournaments, you must be a member of the NSA. No worries, a mere \$20 takes care of this technicality, plus it qualifies you for some informative newsletters with Scrabble-related news and hot playing tips!

Building Up Skills that Kill

Now that you're a registered Scrabble player, you need to practice. Simply relying on the instructions that come in the box won't cut it when practicing for tournaments. Essential rules of the game are the same as they are when playing with Grandma at Thanksgiving, but certain rules, like time limits, apply only to tournament settings. Luckily, tournament rules are readily available on the NSA website.

Once you know the rules of the game, you need to be able to talk the talk. Like any sport or game, competitive Scrabble has its own lingo. A *bingo*, for example is a word that uses all seven letters on the rack. *Bingo* is a good word to know; after all, it earns you a 50-point bonus. *Coffeehousing* is when you make small talk, crack your knuckles, or do other things to distract or mislead your opponent. It's illegal in tournaments, but it's good to

know just in case someone tries to throw you off during a non-tournament game. ("Aunt So-and-So, don't even try to coffeehouse me!")

Talking tough is all well and good, but in the cutthroat world of competitive Scrabble, you've got to be able to back it up with skill. Unfortunately, there is no magical way to learn obscure words. The simplest way is straight memorization, but to be honest, the thought of reading the Scrabble dictionary all the way through puts me to sleep. Some Scrabble players make flash cards. Others study specific groups of words, such as three-letter words starting with "z" or "q" words that don't use "qu." Grouping words not only makes studying a bit easier and breaks up the reading, but it is also more effective and targets challenging situations that could arise during a game.

No matter how much studying you do, the best way to improve is to practice. Playing with friends and family can never hurt, but playing against people as enthusiastic and serious about Scrabble as you are will increase the level of competition. One way to do this is to join a local Scrabble club. Scrabble clubs usually have weekly or monthly meetings where members play tournament-style Scrabble with other people in their city. If there isn't a club located near you, keep an eye out for Scrabble games at your local library or bookstore. These games provide tournament-style play and practice, but are not necessarily NSA-accredited tournaments.

Get in the Game

You've researched, studied, and practiced to the point that lettered tiles are floating off of the page in front of you. Now it's Game Time. The NSA website has a calendar of official Scrabble tournaments that occur every weekend all around the country. Some players choose to stay local while others travel hundreds of miles. At tournaments, players are divided into divisions based on previous tournament experience and ranking. So at your first competition, you could play against a 35 year-old one game and then get your ass kicked by a 15 year-old in the next one. Each tournament will vary, but usually the top three or four players in each division win some money.

After a tournament, you will receive your state and national rank from the NSA. Once you know where you stand, it's time to step up your game: keep studying, practicing, and playing so that you move up in the ranks after your next tournament. ☺

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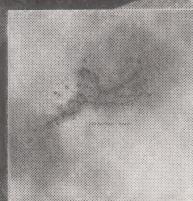
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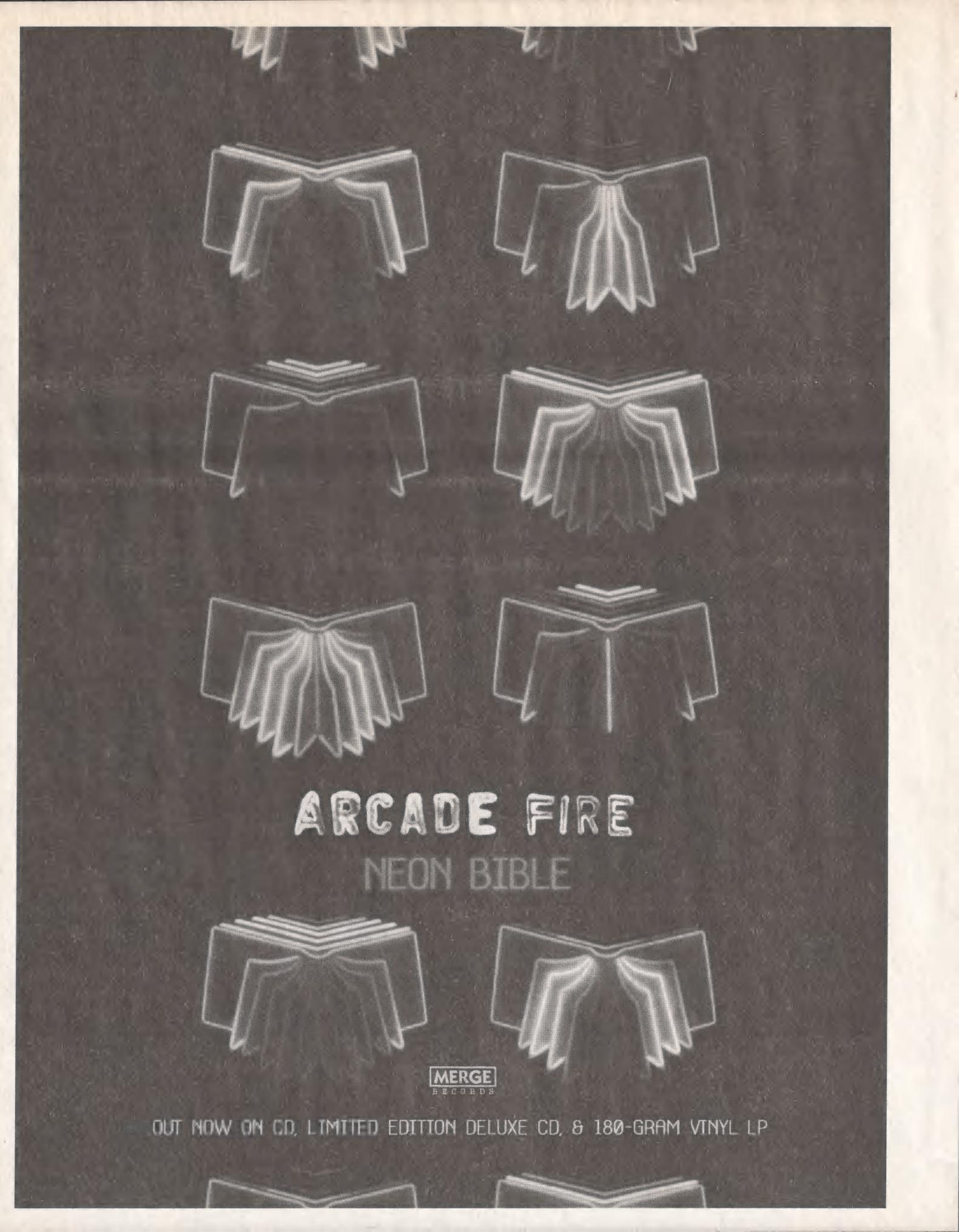
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Coughs—Secret Passage, CD

I have a confession to make: for the longest time I really hated Chicago. Maybe living in Milwaukee has given me a “little brother” complex? All I know is that time after time I would travel to Chicago and become intimidated and anxious in that sprawling concrete jungle that a lot of you call home. On one certain occasion, as I drove from the north side to the far south side, I felt like I was going to have a panic attack. There was nothing but concrete for miles

in every direction. I was surely going to die. As I eventually exited unscathed, I vowed that someday I’d burn the city to the ground... unless I found some sort of redeeming quality.

I found such a redeeming quality in the band Coughs. Their sound harkens back to the heyday of no wave. Vocally, I’m reminded of Teenage Jesus and the Jerks-era Lydia Lunch. Musically, they would fit well as the fifth band on the *No New York* compilation. In addition, their shows—the small handful of them I’ve witnessed in Chicago—have been nothing short of amazing. I can say the same for their Milwaukee shows. Live, they bring the goods, but do they convey that same energy in the studio? The answer is a resounding and confident yes.

Check your stacks of back issues of this here magazine to find my rave review of Coughs’ debut long player, *Fright Makes Right*. With their second full length, *Secret Passage*, they had the unenviable chore of avoiding the “sophomore slump.” My only gripe about the first album was that it would have benefited from different sequencing. It could be the fact that *Secret Passage* is a little less diverse of an album, but it flows really well. It’s also the sort of album that you take in as a whole, not as individual songs. The opener, “Quagmire,” assaults your ears with pummeling rhythms, screeching vocals, some sax skronk, and lots of repetitive guitar wailing. The transition into “Happy Harvest” is pretty much unnoticeable unless you’re waiting for it. “Happy Harvest” mines similar territory, but changes it up enough to distinguish between the songs. “Life of Acne” is my favorite song of the lot. There are so many things going on throughout that it attracts multiple listens. Believe me, it’s pretty amusing wandering around with these lyrics in your head: “I am red / I am red / and I want to leave your head / that is what the pimple said.” As the album winds down, “Intentional Community” is a stand-out track; after a couple listens it had firmly planted itself within my brain.

When people think of writing hooks in songs, they usually think of pop music. Truth be told, most genres benefit from these types of hooks. Coughs have a knack for constructing no-wave noise with a hook for people to grasp onto. It’s the mark of a truly great band. I wish these guys were included on the recent Yoko Ono tribute record. I can only imagine the level of greatness that would result from Coughs backing a Yoko Ono and Anya Davidson duet. A boy can dream, can’t he? —Dan Agacki

Load, PO Box 35, Providence, RI 02901, loadrecords.com

CONFESSION: In Punk Planet 77, the Matador Electric Co. review of *Faulting Fools* was mistakenly attributed to Scott McNow, when in fact it was written by Sarah Moody. We regret the error.



Explosions in the Sky—All of a Sudden Miss Everyone, CD

Since 2003’s *The Earth is Not a Cold Dead Place*, hunting down new material from Explosions in the Sky has been quite a task. Some new tracks appeared on the *Friday Night Lights* soundtrack, as well as on the eight-song *Rescue* EP and various live bootlegs, but that’s been it. In the meantime, previously released tracks were featured on the soundtrack for the *Friday Night Lights*

film and TV show, as well as a couple of Cadillac commercials. Such placement raised more people’s awareness of their music, odds be damned. In other words, the wait for a proper follow-up album has been a long few years. Thankfully, for new and old fans alike, the wait was worth it.

Unlike the three days they had to record *Earth*, Explosions in the Sky set aside some more time to finely craft *All of a Sudden*. Re-teaming with *Earth*’s engineer John Congleton, *All of a Sudden* is their best sounding album yet. Six tracks in length, it allows you to hear all of the band’s trademarks, but in a much more visceral way. When you hear drummer Chris Hrasky hit his snare and floor tom together, you feel some rattles. As a matter of fact, this record lives up to the “from total silence to total violence” tag the band received a few years ago; the quiet parts are like whispers and the loud parts are like screams.

If this music affects you on a deep level, there are a few moments on *All of a Sudden* that will not only make your hair stand up, but they’ll also make your whole spine tingle. Proof comes five minutes into “The Birth and Death of the Day” and a little over nine minutes into “It’s Natural to be Afraid.” These moments feature the kinds of searing guitar leads and pulverizing drumming the band is known for, but four albums in, this still doesn’t feel unwelcome. Though these make the album climax a little early on, at least they are there are climaxes somewhere. It would have been a letdown if there weren’t any at all; they serve as a nice reminder as to why this band has “explosions” in their name.

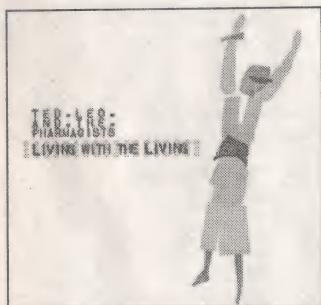
This is not to say the album goes downhill on the ensuing tracks, but there aren’t any wicked tricks after this. Tracks four and six, “What Do You Go Home To?” and “So Long, Lonesome,” sound more in the vein of the abridged sounds found on the *Rescue* EP. The wise usage of piano lends them a different kind of feeling. The waves of piano on “What Do You Go Home To?” sound like a waterfall and provide an interesting detour. Given their brevity, they sound more like an extended intro and outro around the breezy-but-solid “Catastrophe and the Cure.”

The overall mood of *All of a Sudden* definitely sounds similar to that of *Rescue* and *Earth*, but Explosions aren’t drastically repeating themselves here. The band went through a lot of material to get this point. As a result, Explosions in the Sky has added another fine release to their canon.—Eric Grubbs

Temporary Residence Ltd, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206-0997, temporaryresidence.com

About our reviews: We make every attempt to review all the records we receive (CD's, CD-R's, and vinyl only—as long as they're not released on a major label or one of its subsidiaries), but we reserve the right to not review something if we feel it isn't appropriate for Punk Planet. Also, due to the insane volume of mail we receive, some releases fall through the cracks. We're bi-monthly, so it can take up to five months for something to appear in the magazine, so send stuff early, and send it with as much contact information as possible. CD-R's that aren't promotional copies from labels or from CD-R only labels end up in the demo section, and reissues have their own section as well. Records marked with a picture of the album cover have been deemed noteworthy by that specific reviewer, for better or worse, and reviews under 100 words exclusively appear online at www.punkplanet.com. Please keep in mind that when sending your review, it might get trashed. The review is only that reviewer's opinion and doesn't necessarily reflect the opinion of the entire magazine. Personally, I love Decapitated, but I think I'm in the minority over here. See what I'm saying? Any questions, concerns, or accolades can be directed to Dave Hofer at reviews@punkplanet.com. Please DO NOT call the office, as Dave is not there full-time. Thank you. Send your stuff to: Punk Planet, 4229 North Honore, Chicago, IL 60633.

This issue's review team: Abbie Amadio (AJA), Eric Action (EA), Dan Agacki (DA), Bill Angelbeck (BA), Mike Barron (MB), Joanna Buchmeyer (JB), James Cardis (JJC), Mairead Case (MC), Jay Castaldi (JC), Vincent Chung (VC), Ari Ettinger (AE), Kristen Grayewski (KG), Eric Grubbs (EG), Ari Joffe (AJ), Steve Kane (SK), Chay Lawrence (CL), Justin Marcinia (JM), Krystle Miller (KM), Steve Mizek (SRM), Sean Moeller (SM), Sarah Moody (SBM), Scott Morrow (SJM), Brian Moss (BM), Bart Niedziakowski (BN), Missy Paul (MP), Rex Reason (RR), Matt Siblo (MS), Justin Vellucci (JV), Mike Vinikour (MXV). Edited by Dave Hofer (DH)



Ted Leo and the Pharmacists—Living With the Living, CD

Honestly, I've never really disliked anything about or by Ted Leo. Apparently I'm not alone, because punks who have been following him for a decade, his ever-growing, fresh-faced fan base, and the underground community at large can't seem to find anything bad to say either. We laud him because he says exactly what's on his mind, and does it artfully; because he hasn't sold out, watered down, or given up; because he is who he says he is. On *Living With the Living*, his fifth full length with the Pharmacists and one of his best, he is a troubadour, informed citizen, bird, rabble-rouser, and sympathetic soul. This is his first album on Touch and Go, his third with Pharmacists Dave Lerner (bass) and Chris Wilson (drums), and his second recording with Brendan Carty (Fugazi), with whom he hasn't worked on an album since 2001's *Tyranny of Distance*. Like that album, *Living* feels personal, transcendent, and just a bit spotty.

"Sons of Cain" starts things off with a punk-rock jig riff, handclaps, and Leo screaming, "I've got to sing just to exist." "Bottle of Buckie" could be your new favorite song with its Pogues-style mandolin and flute, Leo howling "me and you-hoo," and a story about what happens when Glaswegian neds take the piss out of Ted Leo.

From there we're whisked to "La Costa Brava," a place by the beach where Leo sings about taking time away with his "baby." This song, with its hypnotic repetition and idyllic scene-setting displaces the listener to this place where the front page of the news shows "ain't nothing strange," and the activists can relax for once. We also get to know Leo a bit better over the course of the album when he tells us he cries ("The Unwanted Things" and "The Toro and the Toreador"), introduces us to his family ("CIA"), and, in "Some Beginner's Mind," tells us how he feels conversing with some young punk who doesn't get it ("But if you tell me that I'm getting old / you better take a look at yourself, son"). Body counts, politics, and insults are all taken personally.

At the risk of sounding like I don't get it: what's not to like? Well, as is bound to happen with an album that's lengthy and varied, the transitions can be jarring. "Bomb.Repeat.Bomb," his most angry onslaught to date, which calls out hypocrites with shouts and caustic guitar, is sandwiched between the album's two most easily likable tracks. And instead of following the paradisiacal "La Costa Brava" with the laid-back reggae beats of "The Unwanted Things," he squeezes in "Annunciation Day / Born on Christmas Day," a short track that seems to be saying something biting about religious duty and the shit you can get in if you believe, which, although slaying (in an arena rock god kind of way), comes off as filler (albeit in the spirit of "Filler"). Similarly, the pop-punk ditty "The World Stops Turning" feels insignificant in the scheme of such a substantial album.

And then there's "Colleen." The lone stinker in a career full of good sense, this one features banal rhyming (Colleen / queen / green / scene) so uncharacteristic of Leo (the guy who rhymed "history" with "apostasy"). Even if my heart fell a little the first time I heard this one, it's in essence a song to encourage (Colleen), which Leo seems to achieve.

All that being said, this is an encouraging record, one that gives the rest of us a push in

the right direction. Leo's vocals have never sounded more poignant than on "The Toro and the Toreador," when he sings about the moral choices we've all got to make. And those of us even vaguely familiar with Ted Leo know what kind of good choices he's made, because he's got nothing to hide. As he tells us in "CIA," "You can ask / Take a look / We're all pretty open books / What I stand for / I mostly stand behind / What I am / I mostly can't hide."—Kristen Grayewski
Touch & Go, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, touchandgorecords.com



Planes Mistaken for Stars—Mercy, CD

There's often a fine line between beauty and ugliness. To be able to distinguish between these two, one must get a good taste of both. Planes Mistaken for Stars (PMFS) has definitely had their fair share of both. But it seems that undergoing several lineup changes, touring vigorously, and working to capture a driving sound has only benefited the group.

Being a former post-hardcore-band-turned-punk-rock-metal band takes talent. But it takes even more talent to excel at it. Music of the metal persuasion usually can't keep my attention unless it tends to be more upbeat, with a rhythmic tempo and decent song length. Metal songs in general just tend to be a bit too long, especially if you've been listening to punk rock for more than half your life. PMFS has borrowed elements from both to create a bastard child concept, resulting in some awesome metal that never loses your attention. On most numbers, they rock the fuck out while remaining musically interesting and fresh. Vocally, these guys have no equal. Frontman Jared O'Donnell has this rasp that sounds like he's in desperate need of water, as well as a quiver that's heard at his most wicked vocal belting or when he is whispering like the living dead. Get this: it's not even cheesy in the slightest. He exhibits a kind of realism on the mic that just can't be faked.

Musically, PMFS has progressed with each album. On their last effort, 2004's *Up In Them Guts*, the band made it further musically than they ever had: post hardcore at its finest. The guitar work was forward-moving, like if Fugazi had taken the direction of progressive metal while keeping songs in the two to four minute ballpark. On *Mercy*, driving rhythms act as a threshold for the listener. The band's sound seems more straightforward and epic this time around, most likely due to the changing lineup. It was time for these guys to prove themselves with a more forceful PMFS than that of their previous efforts, and *Mercy* demonstrates just that.

Some of the standout tracks include the larger-than-life "Killed By Killers Who Kill Each Other," the more atmospheric dirge "Church Date," and the full throttle track, "Widow: A Love Song," all of which reveal, in their own way, a noir sense of humor, as well as a serious attempt to give the listener the willies. I think that's why these guys succeed at what they do: they don't get caught up in what is passed off as "metal" these days. PMFS look like your average rock dudes and aren't concerned with image, the way they are "supposed" to sound, or what the kids dig this week. Instead, they navigate both beauty and ugliness and insist on doing music their way: fierce and dark like life was intended to be. —Dana Morse
Abacus, abacusercordings.com

REVIEWER SPOTLIGHTS



Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Action (EA)

Kyra and the Shanks, *Love in a Void/Orgasm Addict*. Kyra and the Shanks is none other than a compilation of the Armitage Shanks and the wonderful Kyra from the world of Billy Childish and such. This single is what was great about 7" singles, and may become what is great about digital distribution of music. Where else can you get two killer covers, press them as a one shot band, and let the consumers eat it up? Kyra's version of the Buzzcocks' "Orgasm Addict" may be better than the original. I hate to admit that the first time I heard this single I figured out some words to this song, even though I had heard the original thousands of times. It made me both happy and upset that this could happen. The other side of this single contains Siouxsie and the Banshees' "Love in a Void." Another rip-roaring, screeching version of a classic punk song found again. I know that a full length of this might be too much, but these two songs get so much airtime for being a silly little 7" that it makes me miss the old days. I would also like to suggest picking up her LP, *Here I Am, I Always Am* which is excellent and contains a few great covers of the Electric Eels, Captain Beefheart, and a Jacques Brel cover of "Marieke" that is so cool, I had to name my daughter after it.

Currently playing: Joe Strummer solo records, Les Hategpinks discography, and both the new Buff Medways and Billy Childish and the British Empire singles.



Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Agacki (DA)

Sonic Youth, *Bad Moon Rising*. I know all the professional rock critics out there laud Sister and Daydream Nation as the apex of Sonic Youth's greatness, but I'm here to call their bluff. Sure, those records are classics, but the problem lies in the fact that too many bloated, self-important rock critic hacks have discounted everything before these records as mere side notes, when the three preceding full lengths were consistently great. With *Bad Moon Rising*, Sonic Youth tapped into a certain mood. Every song is nestled snugly together, so it moves along like one noisy ambient song. There's an omnipresent darkness that gives the album an industrial feel, similar to that of Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*. The rhythms are sparse and simple, something that would change on *EVOL* with the solidifying addition of Steve Shelley on drums. It suits the album well. Even with the songs flowing into one another there are distinguishable hits throughout. The instrumental intro has a more melodic feel that hinted at the band's future plans. It transitions into the catchy tune setting "Brave Men Run (In My Family)." The agonizing and sparse "I Love Her All the Time" holds the middle of the record together. "Justice is Might" trails off into a lull, only to be smashed wide-awake by the uproarious din of "Death Valley '69." The co-voicings by former Teenage Jesus and the Jerks front-woman Lydia Lunch really put this song over the top. Without her it would be great, but with her it's a masterpiece.

Momentary soundtrack. Rhys Chatham, *Die Donnergötter*; Red Krayola, *The Parable of Arable Land*; Skip Spence, *Oar*; Birthday Party, *Prayers on Fire*; Guided by Voices, *Bee Thousand*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Abbie Amadio (AJA)

Yo La Tengo, *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out*. I love this album. It's a great accomplishment to create a record that flows so perfectly from start to finish. *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out* is a beautifully dark and moody album filled with swirling harmonies and faultless melodies. Yo La Tengo's delivery sounds effortless; one song flows into the next in a whirl of sexiness, eerie calm, and slow, deliberate calculation. Amid the eroticism in their slow delivery and composed rhythms is introspection turned outward. The title of the album itself warrants a moment to contemplate its meaning—it's paradoxical, a play on words and imagery. Within their beautifully put-together melodies, emptiness and coldness lies within the songs. *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out* is so well put together that it is out of reach; visually, the songs would appear as fragments—pieces of fantasy wrapped in reality. The album represents an emotional "giving away," a sort of internal place where so much has been expunged that there is nothing left. This album shows the band creating an empire out of the slower grooves that appeared on earlier efforts, and in forgetting their rock tracks, they created an epic album, telling its story by streaming one melody into the next.

Bone-A-Phone: The Blow, Paper Television; Architecture in Helsinki, *In Case We Die*; The Best of Tommy James and the Shondells; Diana Ross and the Supremes, *Anthology*; Jenny Holston and William Whitmore, *Hallways of Always*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Bill Angelbeck (BA)

MC5, *High Time*. My whole conception of music history went through a paradigm shift after I saw a fantastic documentary on this band, called *MC5: A True Testimonial*. I had heard of them, knew they were from Detroit, and gathered that they were protopunk. I just did not expect to see as much punk so foreshadowed in these guys. *High Time* is their final album and it's mostly some fine 1960s psychedelic blues in the vein of Hendrix, but with powerful lead vocals. Fred "Sonic" Smith rips up his guitar in a harsh, raunchy torrent that has some real noise at its edges. In fact, it turns out the "Sonic" in Sonic Youth is in reference to him. In the documentary, the live footage indicates how the band could really disrupt things, and in some ways *High Time* is a restrained document of their later material. The most striking aspect about MC5 is that they were so opposite to all the hippie music at the time, preferring black leather jackets and street-tough attitudes to the peace and commune talk. Also, the lyrics are really political, such as "Gotta Keep Movin'" with statements against the Vietnam War. They

Five—Versus, **CDEP**

These dudes must be doing something right. They got Justin Broderick (Napalm Death, Godflesh, Jesu) to remix two of their tunes to add to this four song EP. Five, a two-man (guitar and drums) crew out of Massachusetts, play breezy, instrumental stoner-metal that succeeds in pulling you in and leading you through their trip. There are several bands out there (Russian Circles, Bongripper, Pelican) playing this type of music, and they all seem to be gear scientists as well as musicians. I'll bet these dudes got tons of awesome, old amps, cabinets, and effects pedals to pull off this intense, warm, psychedelic riffage. (AJ) *Tortuga Recordings*, PO Box 291430, Los Angeles, CA 90029, tortugarecordings.com

Abiku - Location, **CD**

Whoa. Guessing from the artwork I thought this was going to be cutesy . . . or poppy. The first couple seconds of the record seem like it, and then this growling caterwaul starts, but the backing track never catches up, it just continues to sound like a cute, happy video game soundtrack. Every once in awhile the screaming growl stops and turns into this girl who sounds shaken and babbles about stuff with a little bit of that Jello Biafra style vibrato, but not so high-pitched. The vocals are way more industrial and hard sounding, while the backing track just continues to be too techno and video-game blippy. Just imagine some dude playing video games with the really blippy soundtracks and some girl coming in and just flipping out, not in a shriek-y way but in a growling-bowels-of-hell way, and then mumbling in a low-tone-Jello-Biafra way. The combination works on a couple songs; the track "Inhalation" is really good. While Location is altogether interesting, the clashing styles are kind of grating. (MM)

Automation, automationrecords.com

American Distress—S/T, **CD**

This is some monochrome old man punk. It conjures visions of painted leather jackets, tired eyes, and hands gripping bottles of Old Style, pumping along to the mid-tempo plod. Wobbly metal leads overlay the same old recycled three chords, topped with raspy vocals that do little to push the music beyond the dusty punk rock crypt of geezerdom. "Dirty Little Secrets" and "Illogic" speed up the process with oi tempos and the cliché "whoa-oh" back-up vocals that may cause your eyes to roll into the back of your head and induce rapid fire déjà-vu back to a sweat sock basement, where you pondered the question "Have I wasted my life watching innumerable crappy punk bands?" I exhort us to try harder. I know we can do better. Also, American Distress has metal breakdowns. (SC)

Tent City, 101 W. 23 St. #2341, NY, NY 10011, tentcityrecords.com

Armalite—S/T, **CD**

Well, well, well, what do we have here? Is this a very cool full length featuring Atom from the infamous Atom and His Package? It seems that this is the man along with some friends from other notable bands and zines. This is not Atom and his quirky sideshow that got too big for its britches and kind of imploded. Rather, it's a full-fledged (albeit though part time) rock 'n' roll punk band. If there are two bands from the '90s that I have been waiting for someone to rip

off and pull off at the same time, it would have to be Fuel and Ignition. It seems the Armalite folks, whom I think are similar in age, have the same idea. In every aspect of this release, there's the passion. Who doesn't love a booklet that not only has lyrics, but also has notes for every song? We could wish that Armalite was a full-time project touring the United States and beyond, but I would bet the energy and freshness would wear off fast. Why do you think that so many debut records kick so much ass? It is the exact reason that this self-titled platter kicks ass: because it isn't forced. Support the wonderful No Idea Records and order this from them. I guarantee that you won't be disappointed. Thank you, Atom, for retiring your old show and showing us that you can R-O-C-K too. (EA)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, noidearecords.com

At Dusk—You Can Know Danger, **CD**

The third record from this Portland trio aims for the stars but, ultimately, the whole package comes off more like a series of passing curiosities than a cohesive collection of carefully crafted songs. That's a shame, because these childhood friends clearly share an interesting musical language—one that blurs the lines between poppy ear candy and time-shifting math-rock. The jazzy first section of "Say That You'll Do It" is almost mesmerizing and the textured, Chavez-style guitar attack of tracks like "Forever Ago" works well. Elsewhere, radio-hungry vocals turn ambitious songs into pop-rock templates or the trio meanders so much it's hard to grab onto a melody worth humming or a refrain worth repeating. (JV)

Self-released, atdusk@gmail.com, atduskmusic.com

Awkward Stage, the—Heaven is for Easy Girls, **CD**

Poppy, melodic, and sometimes retro, the Awkward Stage is a fresh entry in the otherwise stale sing-songy indie field. Featuring a mix of jazz, rock, and country tunes, as well as infusions of brass, piano, and layered gospel vocals, songwriter Shane Abram Nelken displays what I wish so many others in this crowded genre understood: good music takes talent, not simply whispery vocals, light guitar plucking, and a bass drum. The fact that Shane's lyrics are thought provoking, curious and at times, simultaneously sad and hilarious, helps set this CD apart. A few favorites include swinging '60s tune "We're Going for a Ride," title track ("Heaven is for easy girls / Heaven is for sluts so say lonely ruminant boys in ruts") and "I Love You Hipster Darling" ("You fuck like you're running for office / you fuck like you're running for your life"). Overall, each track is different enough from the one before it to keep the entire disc interesting, but it doesn't fall into the "and now for something completely different—and totally misplaced" trap that so many bands wander into. (SSW)

Mint, PO Box 3613, Vancouver, BC, Canada, mintrecs.com

Bombshell—To Hell With Motives, **CD**

Judging by the bands I keep getting to review from Indianola Records, I could probably be forgiven for thinking they were a Victory Records tax write-off; the label is certainly nailing the poppy metalcore genre with an unnerving accuracy as of late. Now add Bombshell to their already bloated roster of potential

major-label hopefuls; another band whom on paper I should hate, but whom I can't help but actually like (in a guilty pleasure kind of way of course . . . ahem). Like labelmates Across Five Aprils, Bombshell understand the finer points of songwriting and dynamics, and even when they're desperately trying to ape Coheed and Cambria, the band still manage to sound fresh thanks to the energy and enthusiasm that keeps *To Hell with Motives* afloat in a sea of mediocrity. Damn you Indianola Records, damn you and your catchy tunes! (CL)

Indianola, indianolarecords.com

Campo Bravo—Goodbye, Oklahoma, CD

On *Goodbye, Oklahoma*, the strings outsing the singer. Mark Matos' voice shakes or misses notes throughout the record, but Matos and the rest of the band wisely open the primarily mellow, slow folk-rock songs to improvisation. In "Incinerated," a jubilant song about death and the afterlife, Lady Vickie Brown's fiddle dances like glowing ashes rising from the flames and toward heaven. In the lovely "Amateurs," Matos sings, "Amateur comes from the Latin word for lover / seems a relevant revelation here beneath these covers / we are amateurs." Brown's sighing violin trails Matos' vocals, and her harmony vocals make the song sound professional. As in "Amateurs," Matos makes the record sporadically more interesting with thoughtful turns of phrase. In "Collision Course," he compares himself to a "space-ship low on fuel/heading towards a collision course." Such unusual images and observations forgive some of the duller music and his voice. In the end, though, Brown's violin can't carry the entire record, and Matos' lyrics aren't all profound enough to prop up the other inconsistencies. *Goodbye, Oklahoma* won't introduce the world to Campo Bravo, but it does not need to be the band's swan song, either. (JM)

KEEP, PO Box 18972, Tucson, AZ 85731, keeprecordings.com

Catfish Haven—Tell Me, CD

In a world of trendy music, Catfish Haven has raised the bar to an entirely different level. Or, perhaps they've lowered the bar. Either way, they're making music that feels completely unpretentious and avoids all hipster fashion. Catfish Haven, aside from being a band, is a trailer park in southern Missouri where singer and guitarist George Hunter grew up. In a way, the band captures its name perfectly: the music is stripped down, bluesy, and rocky—a straight-ahead, trailer-park approach. It captures southern blues and soul while drowning itself in a pool of cheap whiskey. Heartfelt and genuine, Catfish Haven is a band from yesteryear that hasn't paused, only to realize that it's 2007. Perhaps this is their charm. Still, their songs ring a little too basic for my math-rock roots. Maybe I'm just an elitist. However, I can still appreciate a distinctive record when I hear one, and *Tell Me* is not your everyday record. (MB)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 West Second Street, Bloomington, IN 47403, secretlycanadian.com

Comfortable For You—My Entire Life is a Lie, CD

Even though they had already decided to break up after three years on the scene, San Diego band Comfortable For You (CFU) had one last release in them yet. The result was *My Entire Life is a Lie*, a six-song EP that finds the group going out at the top of their

game. CFU's aggressive, post-hardcore sound most resembles another defunct San Diego group, Drive Like Jehu, but their rapidly shifting riffs also call to mind Fugazi, Refused, and even AFI at times. Two guitarists craft precise airstrikes of limber, stop-start progressions, and thick riffs, joined by agile drum kit work and dirty bomb bass attacks. Guitarist Steve Peart's enraged screams, and no less impassioned vocals, add to the already tense atmosphere CFU creates instrumentally, though his tone is vastly superior to his words. While CFU wouldn't have won any awards for stunning originality, their hold on the post-hardcore torch was strong. In fact, the only complaint one could muster of *My Entire Life* is its brevity. Fans of CFU's aforementioned inspirations should track down this EP, relive the glory days, and start mourning the loss of another great band they never got to see. (SRM)

Loud and Clear, PO Box 502183, San Diego, CA 92116, loudandclearrecords.com

Cotton, Josie—Movie Disaster Music, CD

I got really excited when I got the new Josie Cotton, the very same Josie Cotton of "Johnnie are you queer?" fame. But, she's grown up since the '80s, and this is far more toned down and adult. The first half of the album sounds totally clueless, like somebody ended up in a fancy studio with crazy equipment and didn't really know how to use anything but decided to utilize everything on every song. She and her band figure it out by "Nikita," and from then on, the rest of the album works well. It's quirky but tame. It's electro power pop with a kind of lounge influence. The last track, "You're the Boss," is really different than the rest; it's quiet with flamenco guitar and random percussion flourishes, and Josie Cotton sounds the most at ease here. It's like the entire album was just a search for this moment, and the last song was the point for the whole time. (MM)

Scuffry, no contact information provided

Dead to Me—Cuban Ballerina, CD

For most of us, pop punk has become increasingly less appealing with age. The once-alluring cheap thrills of sped-up, three-chord pop structures, hallmark humor, oh-oh harmonized choruses, toddler-safe mosh pits, and synchronized punk jumps just ain't what it used to be. Then again, every so often a band comes along that does it all right, and reminds us exactly why we fell in love with the stuff in the first place. Enter: Dead to Me—an antagonistic, blaring, locked-tight band, rife with infectious melody. Given the seasoned-veteran status of the San Francisco quartet (One Man Army, Western Addition, and one long-time employee of Fat Wreck Chords), the sweet damage done is almost to be expected. The band sifts from North California's cream of the crop, specifically that of the East Bay mid-to-late 1990s heyday (Pinhead Gunpowder), but expands, incorporating their own unique tendencies with some of their labelmates' signature sounds (Dillinger Four) and the snotty charm of the late '70-era British movement (the Buzzcocks).

Introspectively honest and committed to a personal take on politics, vocalists Jack Darlymple and Chicken have both penned concise, thought-out lyrics; thankfully providing another exception to one more unfortunate trademark of the genre's current status. If

FEATURED REVIEWS



Burning Paris, the—Half-Truths & Indiscretions, CD

That the album art for *Half-Truths & Indiscretions* is plated in sepia tone can be considered fitting. The Burning Paris existed as a young six-piece from Boston between 2000-2004, though all of their releases quickly sold through and went into the grey area of musical limbo known as "out of print." Thankfully, Magic Bullet saw the need to revisit their catalog, and so *Half Truths & Indiscretions* is their bookend anthology—it's over an hour of relieved memories with not a bad track in the bunch, all infused with an incomparable grace and ease. The music here is full, lush, and intense; cellos lines and keyboards float through the mix and are rounded out by hushed vocals, softly churning guitars, and lulling bass lines. As a group, the Burning Paris excels at punctuating small moments in these slow-burning compositions, recalling both the post-rock majesty of Explosions in the Sky and the more melancholic moments of Pinback. On "Silver Trees," the coldest days of winter become suddenly punctuated by a perfectly placed cymbal crash, and the group flaunts their poppier chops on "Let's Watch the World Collapse," offering a full breadth of possibilities for their sound. If feedback gets better with age, this collection is verging on perfection. The band treads a thin line between post-rock earnestness and quiet sentiment, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a recent group more deserving of the re-attention. Overall, this anthology covers the group's first and only full album, an EP, and three rarities (one limited, one cover, and one live track) to round it out. The only extraneous track here arrives in the form of a cover of the Smiths' "Asleep," which only sounds like a tinier version of the original with different vocals doused in reverb. Not a high point, but it can't break the greatness of the rest of the comp. (SBM)

Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Dr, Fredericksburg, VA 22405, magicbulletrecords.com



Converge—No Heroes, CD

Holy shit: Converge. The name alone not only asks for, but demands respect—from a time when originality has not only left, but has left us with the burden of vicious repetition (And I'm not talking industrial music here). Thankfully, there are still those who strive to bring forth something fresh. This band of a decade and a half creates something that is not only fresh, but also proudly wears what at times resembles the face of death. What can I say that hasn't already been said before about Converge? Since day one, their music has been so aggressive and in your face. Over time, these guys have only benefited from experience making this four-piece incredibly multifaceted. Elements of metal and thrash are spied but then flawlessly blended with punk rock, hardcore, prog, stoner rock, and much more. With their last few releases, Converge has been both praised and scrutinized for their newfound diversity, so on *No Heroes*, they seemed to take it upon themselves to bring back the ferocity of early releases with their continual attention to detail in genre-blending music. On the first run-through of this release (especially the first half), the pounding sounds stronger than ever. But with closer attention, you'll notice this is more than your dad's metal; there is an underlying rhythm and melody. At times, you could remove the guitar or bass lines and place them into other styles of music seamlessly. It's not until you get to the halfway point that Converge really starts to shift gears. The nine-and-a-half minute epic "Grim Heart/Black Rose" brings forth their somewhat softer side with throbber stoner rock and post-hardcore that showcases vocalist Jacob Bannon's singing ability. It may shock some. Afterwards, many moments of amazing guitar work stand out as more rhythmic and dynamic compared to the contrasting plowing of the rest of the band ("Orphaned"). "Lonewolves" seems like a mash-up with a melodic hardcore band, but with Converge on chorus duties. Overall *No Heroes* will please older fans while giving the newer fans a reason to fall in love. This is easily one of the best metal/hardcore fusion records in the last couple of years, and it was well worth the wait. (DM)

Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90026, epitaph.com



Dawson, Kimya—Remember That I Love You, CD

Remember That I Love You, the second effort from one half of the Moldy Peaches, is a bevy of disjointed articulations on life that are lovingly simple. The subject matter, however, is anything but. In 10 tracks, Dawson employs her oddball take on folk to tackle everything from psychosis to body image and death—from everyday occurrences to the complex simplicity of human nature, but each is approached on an intensely personal level. Not only are friends a central topic on her songs, but it is telling that they make appearances in the liner notes as well, as she brings her buddies in on a few tracks to either help sing on a ramshackle chorus or contribute harmonies. Dawson's quick wit takes the forefront here, and her rip-rapping cadence shines as she darts through each track, whether it's regarding good and bad bacteria or dancing around in France. These are rambles with a calculated release, and they tackle huge topics (such as the heartbreaking "My Mom") without ever coming across as self-pitying or preachy. It is a record made in an effort to relate to people, to be a comfort to those in need of such, and to build upon a community of friends and fans that Dawson holds dear. At certain moments, it is utterly compelling and brave, such as on "Underground," which features a morbid yet upfront chorus of: "Don't ever put this body in a casket / burn it and put the ashes in a basket / and throw them in the Puget Sound / I don't ever want to be underground." As she intones "yeah, we're not alone" at the conclusion of "The Competition," it is clear that Dawson took that simple idea as a reason to make this record in the first

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even formed a White Panther party in support of the Black Panthers, and, at one point, the FBI raided their home in Detroit. MC5 mentored the band Iggy & the Stooges, whom they helped get signed. Iggy took those punk elements even further, but it's fascinating to hear such a strong source of influence in MC5. For some rock history, check out both *High Time* and the documentary.

Play: Midlake, *The Trials of Van Occupanther*; Mi and L'au, *S/T*; Beirut, *Gulag Orkestar*; Arbouretum, *Rites of Uncovering*; Deerhoof, *Friend Opportunity*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Mike Barron (NB)

Lifter Puller, *Half Dead and Dynamite*. Lifter Puller was a seminal Minneapolis four-piece from the late '90s led by the energetic and quirky frontman Craig Finn. You may know Craig Finn from his new band, the Hold Steady (a poppier and less interesting, but still highly entertaining group). When I first got this record, I hardly paid any attention to it, but I soon discovered a little track by the name of "I Like the Lights." This quickly moved into my constant rotation of songs, and I figured that I should give the album another shot. Well, what do you know? It rocks. Finn's lyrics are brilliant, with a sort of stream-of-consciousness feel as he spits out words about girls, drugs, and various cities (listen to "Nassau Coliseum" and you'll know what I'm talking about). The music is poppy, but angular and complex, a la Archers of Loaf. Years ago, if I had heard Lifter Puller, I bet they would have been a band I would have thoroughly made fun of. However, over time, I have developed an appreciation for more complex pop and rock records. There are moments in almost every song in which everything clicks into a melodic format, and it sounds like the audio equivalent of a slice of warm apple pie. With vanilla ice cream. And maybe a little caramel sauce. At this point, I cannot get enough of Finn's trademark gruff vocals and genius lyrics. I could also go for some apple pie. (MB)

Music that I can drink to: Lifter Puller, *Half Dead and Dynamite*; Haymarket Riot, *Bloodshot Eyes*; Archers of Loaf, *Icky Mettle*; Unwound, *Leaves Turn Inside You*; Owls, *S/T*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Andrea Bussell (AMB)

Grayling, *The Time Was Now*. I was only lucky enough to hear *The Time Was Now* about two years ago, and I'm guessing that practically no one outside of Detroit has heard it. But word is, that in the late '90s Grayling was poised to be the "next big thing" from Detroit. Personal tragedies and differences, however, got in the way, causing a lengthy break from music followed by a rotating cast of members (the last incarnation consisted of Wolny, John Speck of the Fags, Jackson Smith of Back in Spades AKA known as the son of Patti Smith and Fred Smith, and Joe Leone of Fletcher Pratt). But *The Time Was Now* remains as a sort of emblem of hardship turned beautiful. Alternating between ringing guitar solos and subdued echoing ones, these songs are full of catchy-as-hell pop rhythms, especially for how sad they are. I don't like to endorse MySpace in any way, but if it's the only way you'll hear this band, I don't care. Check them out at www.myspace.com/grayling. Listen to "Kevlar."

What got me through the winter: The National, *Alligator*; Big Star, #1 Record/Radio City; Explosions in the Sky, *All of a Sudden I Miss Everyone* (reviewed this issue); the Sound, *In the Hothouse*; various Danzig.



Reviewer Spotlight: Mairead Case (MC)

Presidents of the United States of America, *S/T*. Nevermind broke in 1991, so by the time this album was released in 1995, grunge had gone from lone wolf to lemming. A lot of people think the Presidents were sellouts, and in some lights, they're completely right. Here's what I know, though: many first kisses and first smokes were had and toke to "Stranger" ("I saw you! It was incredi-bile") and it's hard not to smile at the goofiness of lyrics like "Lump sat alone in a boggy marsh / totally emotionless except for her heart"). It's a finite sort of success, but that's nothing to sneer at. Also un-sneerworthy are Ballew and Dederer's bassitar and guitbass, AKA heavy-gauge, modified, six-string guitars, and the fact that the band occasionally gigged at their old high schools, Bush and Northwest. Take that, Parents' Day—we're dorks, and here's a song about the Devil, who must be a dentist with "deep jawbreaker eyes."

All the furor of thinking / swallowed like a song in a turred flute: Maher Shalal Hash Baz, *Faux Départ* (reviewed this issue); V/A, *Tropicalia*; the Saturday Knights, *S/T*; Roommate, *The New Steam*; ritscherarchive.org.



Reviewer Spotlight: Simon Czerwinskyj (SC)

Stewart Copeland, *Rumble Fish*, Original Soundtrack (OST). The back cover of this album features a photo of Mr. Copeland wearing what looks to be a sous-chef's outfit and bears the caption "The Rhythmatist" (what a pretentious prick). That caption, however, is an appropriate label for what Copeland executes on the *Rumble Fish* OST. All the tracks on this album are built upon and bolstered by strong and pointed rhythms. Copeland plays a wide array of instruments—including a typewriter—and uses them all to great effect, creating atmospheric pop that is somewhat informed by the reggae-lite of the Police, but is ultimately very distinct and quirky, with an off-kilter, nervous edge. "Our Mother is Alive" has a great shuffling drum pattern with a strong, non-wanking saxophone melody, complemented by a strong brass and piano foundation, and is very triumphant, to say the least. Many of the tracks display an oddly uplifting melancholy mood (very appropriate for the film), beginning as pop jaunts and giving way to strange passages of pure soundscapes and minor key synthesizers. The drumming throughout is exemplary, never flashy and always tasteful, serving the songs in just the right manner, adding a strange danceable dimension to the record. Stewart Copeland created a soundtrack

you're wallowing in pop-punk cynicism, tap into this. Think of it as a musical heart transplant. (BM)

Fat Wreck Chords, P.O. Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119, fatwreck.com

Demolition Doll Rods—*There is a Difference*, CD

Years ago, some friends of mine went to a Montreal strip club. A dancer led the nerdy academic one to the stage and threw him on his back. She then stuffed a dildo ass-first in his mouth and proceeded to face-fuck him, slowly grinding to a punching climax. That spirit of raw, dominating sexual energy seems to be the muse channeling every Demolition Doll Rods record. A duo of guitars and stripped down drum "set" impressively prove what every punk knows: rudimentary rock 'n' roll lies within the soul. And, for over a decade, these Motown heroes prove that what lacks in technical ability can be easily relinquished with a tight pop hook followed by a lot of swagger—while never lowering decadence into a novelty stick. A difficult feat, considering the band performs in ridiculous outfits that leave little to the imagination. As refined as their previous outings, *There is a Difference* proves that their sound just never gets old. Margaret's raunchy rasp, Danny's bluesy licks, and Thumper's sparse beating combine into a sleazy siren's song, bringing elements of R&B, soul, and gospel into a solid rock 'n' roll record. (VC)

Swami, swamirecords.com

Divider—*At Twilight*, CD

In *At Twilight*, Divider combines a maniacal chug-scream with greased lightning thrashola and lyrics that aspire to more than alpha-male navel-gazing (as is the trend for mook-rock these days). Divider applies effective dynamics to all their songs, especially for the metallic hardcore genre; they aren't afraid to make their songs over-the-top and a little ridiculous, in the best possible way. The vocals help the frenzy of the music, in that the singer varies his delivery from the typical hippopotamus bellow of modern hardcore. And the lyrics are genuine and self-aware, passionately addressing hardcore and the current political climate. This passion is an important ingredient, as it helps make music more engaging. The title track is a nice departure from the rest of the disc, with dreamy guitars and spoken/shouted vocals addressing the importance of friendship during the apocalypse (that description may sound like Dr. Phil crossed with *The Road Warrior*, but it's even better than that, maybe). As an added bonus, the CD is brisk and does not overstay its welcome. (SC)

Shock Value, shockvaluerecords.com

Dry Rot—*Permission*, 7"

Good, mid-school hardcore like Dry Rot is very invested in being noisy and snotty. There is a wise-ass, Flipper-esque edge to the whole deal. The first side of this 7" bangs through six numbers at 45 RPM, complete with off-key guitar solos/leads, and smarmy, snot-ridden vocals. The tempo is generally old-school fast with some mid-tempo circle pit action thrown in. Meanwhile, the lyrics are bile-filled—"Killed by the Government" being an ode to the desire to kill the president and being hunted down and killed for it. In fact, the whole package is presented with that timeless, sarcastic, punk rock humor. The second side contains just one song and tests the listener's patience and tolerance for

forementioned humor with unabashed glee. "Do You See Me?" abandons the hardcore punk of side one for a total bird-flipping noise experiment that echoes Flipper and the last track on the Dead Milkmen's *Big Lizard in my Backyard*. The undistorted guitar plays the same chords over and over while the drummer pounds out a 4/4 beat and the "vocalist" moans "Do you see me?" with tons of effects and noises poured over the top. I prefer this challenge to the generally safe first side. The record doesn't bust out into anything special, but it's a nice addition to/departure from the modern punk landscape. Pointed ambition and smart-ass passion, plus the pleasing and clean packaging, helps Dry Rot stand out from the legions of band resting on their laurels. (SC)

Cold Vomit, coldvomit.com

Duby, Heather—*S/T*, CD

Most musicians in the singer/songwriter genre rely heavily on their vocals and persona to carry their music, rather than the melodies . . . a difficult task to accomplish. On Heather Duby's self-titled album, it's a relief that the all-to-familiar story is turned upside down. Duby's songwriting realizes memorable melodies, which, instead of being overshadowed by vocals that try too hard to be the centerpiece of the song, intertwine faultlessly with her crystalline voice. Clearly, she knows enough to allow subtlety to come into play. The tracks on *Heather Duby* range from electronic-backed pop rock to more serious piano-and-strings-led sad songs. Somber at times and playful at others, Duby shows a range in her songwriting and performance, all the while achieving a balance that is typically hard to find. (AJA)

Sonic Boom Recordings, 2209 NW Market St, Seattle, WA 98101, sonicboomrecordings.com

End of a Year—*Sincerely*, CD

If you know your DC punk history (and you should), the name End of a Year should immediately bring to mind the Embrace song. This is no mere coincidence, but rather a deliberate clue as to what the 11 songs on *Sincerely* sound like. Comparisons to bands of the "Revolution Summer" are obvious, but in terms of current punk and hardcore, End of a Year are leaps and bounds ahead of their contemporaries in relation to content, songwriting, and delivery. Vocalist Patrick Kindlon's often poetic, sometimes self-deprecating lyrics are rooted in failed relationships, friendship, and personal triumph and tragedy. He's hardly an incredible singer, but his monotone delivery is raw, endearing, and conveys an honesty a traditionally beautiful voice never could. End of a Year truly created one of the best records of 2006 and with each listen I'm reminded of how all encompassing and incredible punk rock can be. (SK)

Revelation P.O. Box 5252 Huntington Beach, CA 92615-5252, revelationrecords.com

Fleshies—*Scrape the Walls*, CD

It seems almost inevitable: listen to enough punk rock for long enough and a certain amount of burnout sets in for new bands playing the same old styles. That's not to say the stuff that's already close to your heart loses its luster, but it becomes tougher for new bands to blow you away. Then, every few years a band playing what can only be described as simple punk rock comes along and you're reminded why you love this stuff. The Fleshies were such a band for me when I

heard their first full length five-ish years ago. With *Scrape the Walls*, their third full length, they continue their catchy, messy, smart, and frantic take on resurrecting the punk-rock corpse. Thankfully, the Fleshes show no signs of being anything less than awesome. Get this and have your faith restored. (RR)
Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141-419092, alternativetentacles.com

Four Deadly Questions/ The Answer Lies—Split, CD

On this split, Four Deadly Questions kick things off with a song that starts out like "Blue Orchid" by the White Stripes. They quickly move on to successfully incorporate other styles like punk, hardcore, and garage rock. The not-too-dirty-but-not-too-clean mid-fidelity recording and blown-out vocals suit the style, and there are great girl vocals on a couple of the choruses, especially "Bottom Rung." The Answer Lies is more straightforward in their approach to punk-edged hardcore, and the "I gargle broken glass" vocal style instantly made me think of Filth. In fact, that's an apt description of the music as well. Good stuff from both bands, with Four Deadly Questions winning by a nose. (JC)
GC, PO Box 3806, Fullerton, CA 92834, gcrecords.com

From First to Last - Heroine, CD

If you read the press release for this CD, they'd have you believe that From First to Last is the only—and most original—punk band out there. Their "originality" is apparently their ability to mix up styles of emo, hardcore, metal, and industrial that result in a sound that would, if it got a little more melodic, have them as a guest on *TRL*. There are bits of goodness scattered through the songs but the vocals, which range from emo wailing to metal crooning, just don't do it for me. Musically, their harder stuff that sounds like industrial post-hardcore is pretty decent, but the overall end result of this concoction left me feeling rather unsatisfied. I imagine this will be a big hit with people who are into the new AFI album. (MXV)
Epitaph, epitaph.com

Fuck the Facts—Stigmata High Five, CD

Although I've heard the name bandied about for several years, I hadn't gotten around to listening to Fuck the Facts before this, their Relapse debut, landed on my doorstep. It looks like I've been missing out on some great left-field grindcore. Definitely for fans of Old Man Gloom and their ilk, Fuck the Facts stray from full-tilt metallic grind into somber instrumental passages and gloomy ambience with measured ease. If you like your grindcore gritty, grimy, and post-industrial, you've probably been a fan of the band for some time now. A great album from a mature band—I wish I had caught them sooner. (CL)
Relapse, relapse.com

Hatepinks—Complete Recordings: We are the Fucks, CD

Holy crap! What an unbelievable release to even exist. Les Hatepinks are an impossible to-keep-track-of French band that do everything good that exists in garage and '77-style punk. This is a Japan-only release and well worth the time hunting down. It's a 42-track discography that includes some hard-to-come-by split singles, compilation tracks, and mini-LPs. Often releasing their records in different versions and for-

mats for different countries, I have literally gone bonkers trying to keep up. So this disc crosses my desk, and man, is it nice having these tracks all together. The big worry in approaching 42 tracks of the Hatepinks is whether they can last that long without getting repetitive. Even the true fan doubted, and I was wrong. Whether they are cursing their heads off or shouting their name, Les Hatepinks keep the energy going top-notch. I will warn you, though, there is a lot coming out after this disc, and I wouldn't expect a part two to the discography anytime soon. You will get hooked on these frogs if you are a garage fan. The last band that grabbed my attention like them was probably the Rip Offs. Yes, it is that good. (EA)
[Self-released, hatepinks.free.fr/news.htm](http://self-released.hatepinks.free.fr/news.htm)

Herbert—Scale, CD

So what does an album purportedly derived from the sounds of answering machines, French horns, a parrot, an arms dealer vomiting, and over 720 other objects and voices sound like? In the hands of Andrew Herbert, these found sounds become a type of celebratory '70s soul, divine disco-meets-orchestral-score electro-pop. Based on Herbert's recording processes and past avant-garde releases, one would think Scale might be crushed by weighty concepts, or the pretension of a musique concrete composition; however, the result here is foremost heavy on melody. (How difficult it must have been to fuse abstract sounds into something so easy to listen to.) Songs feature the smooth vocals of ethereal soprano Dani Siciliano, a live orchestra that sounds borrowed from a 1950s Hollywood drama—well practiced in how to swell the woodwinds and strings at just the right moments—and a buffet of electronic gizmos. The tracks combine these elements to sound right for the club, the lounge, the Prince album, the bedroom, or, in a perfect world, the radio; "Birds of a Feather" or "Movie Star" could compete with Timbaland or Gwen Stefani for air time, although Herbert's take on pop is so dense, you could listen to it for years and still find new noises to admire. That, and Herbert doesn't sample anyone else's music to make his own. And that although the melodies are easily distracting, the lyrics often hint at political subversion, something that the FM dial seems allergic to. Nevermind, because with Scale, Herbert fashions his own ideal aural world where the mundane meets the glamorous and insubordination sounds sweet. (KG)
K7 Records, k7.com

Honeycreeper—Freakqualizer, CD

When was the last time you wondered where Ska-voozie and his Epitones got to? Me either. Ska's third wave subsided, leaving Reel Big Fish and their horn-toting hep cat brethren washed ashore, and yet we all got by. In fact, with ska's third incarnation, we saw it go commercial, become fodder for teen movie soundtracks, and focus on perfecting covers of '80s hits; so it seemed natural, a blessing even, that we (and they) lost interest. Enter Honeycreeper. *Freakqualizer* is their first full length, and it's clear from their liner notes and lyrics about "punching [themselves] in the brain" that they fancy themselves quite the comedians. Instead of chuckling or skanking, I was counting down the remaining time of the 11 tracks of five-minute plus funkified, dorkified, guitar

place, as it is about relating to people, and the comfort that comes from those relationships. Regardless of any opinions regarding the often-incestuous Northwest music scene, *Remember* is ultimately a charming record, and music this earnest is inherently beyond judgment. (SBM)
K, PO Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507, krecs.com

Hammerlock—True Grit: The First Five Years, CD

You ever get the sense, after the fact, that you were missing something in your life, but you didn't really know you were missing it until you actually experienced it? That's how I feel about the music of Hammerlock. They've been around for a minute (this reissue gathers most of the songs from their first few albums released back in the late '90s), but I'd never heard of them until Mr. Hofer, bless his heart, sent this to me to review. I swear to god this disc didn't leave my player for a week. I listened to this fucker in the car, at work, while I was eating eggs in the morning, and over franks and beans at night. Three or four weeks on, I still listen to it steadily, from beginning to end, on a regular basis. I'm listening to it now, in fact. "Media Sucker," to be exact, is one of vocalist/guitarist Travis Kenney's dead-on political rants about weak-minded people who can't think for themselves, and instead spout off random "facts" that they've heard on the radio or read in some newspaper. He and his bassist/duet partner/wife, Elizabeth Kenney, along with a rotating cast of drummers, play a perfect mix of hardcore punk, country, rockabilly, and Lynyrd Skynyrd riffs. They use this hard rocking, twangy backdrop to tell their life stories. It's "outlaw" music in the sense that their lyrics speak to the inherent need that certain individuals have to stray from the herd, to not go with the flow, to not be blindly lead by fools. The way they lay it out, we're living in a time when American's freedoms are being stripped away at a record pace, and citizens are inundated with propaganda from both the right and the left designed to kill our individuality. Well, these folks are standing up and saying, "Fuck you! I'm gonna say what I want to say, live the way I want to live, smoke where I want to smoke, exercise my second amendment rights, and get as wild as I damn well please!" Call it a "biker morality," which actually fits since these folks are the preferred house band for one of the Nomad chapters in their home state of California. They balance their angrier tunes with Liz and Travis' love letters to each other, and bang out a few totally heartfelt (if a tad off key) renditions of classics country songs like "Tennessee Whisky," "He Stopped Loving Her Today," and "Big City." If you have a restless spirit and a serious problem with authority, go order this disc now. They're giving it away for free via their website, with the purchase of their exceptional new album, "Forgotten Range." (AJ)
Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, steelcagerecords.com



Marble Valley—Wild Yams, CD

Steve West has made the transition many may pine for, but at which few succeed: from drummer (of Pavement) to frontman. On this, his third solo album, we can hear why his first inclination may not have been for the stage front—namely, because his vocal ability levels off at a monotone drawl—and why he eventually found his way there—among other reasons, because his natural skill for generating creative rhythms extends to his songwriting and way with words. This album has a considerable lyrical maturity (read: a pre-occupation with booze, death, and aches, and pains), which is narrated with clever lyrical devices and patient hooks. In "Fag & a Light," West juxtaposes the questions "Hey man can I bum a fag in the light?" and "Will I get in?", mixing dialogues that could be heard outside of clubs or at St. Peter's gate. He doesn't judge but knows the kind of heaven he envisions is one where the saints can all drink because no one needs to drive. And in "Another Round" a playful synth meets scratching and a sitar sample as we hear how he would like to be shown appreciation: "[one more] bourbon and coke / before I leave this earth / You know I'm worth / another round." However, the best songwriting is saved for "I Could Drink an Ocean," in which West recounts a poignant, first-person narrative of a relationship crumbling: "I took my fist and punched it through the wall / you grabbed the kids and drove them to the mall / It's all, it's all over now." Here, his monotone delivery adds to the overall sense of numbness. In fact, his vocals, on the whole static and low, actually nuance the album with much personality; they inflect sarcasm ("Computer Man"), pain ("Diary of a Stone Mason"), frustration ("Desert"), and recall the lethargic, smart quips of Silver Jews' David Berman. And his band provides plenty to appreciate, whether minimally garage-rocking or carving out prog-like divergences, glossing it all with indie sheen. *Wild Yams* is wittily executed, well soused, and worth a listen. (KG)
Indikator, indikatorrecords.com

New Trust, the - Dark is the Path That Lies Before Us, CD

Nestled amongst the serene pastures and woodlands of Northern California's upper Bay Area, the sleepy city of Santa Rosa isn't exactly a household geographic name. Shamefully, the vibrancy of its musical scenery is also relatively under the radar. While I'm sure some folks like their native secrets kept under tongue, when dealing with such inspirational enclaves, I tend to feel inclined to spread the good word. Over the years, the collective members of the New Trust have all played their part in keeping their local arts community afloat. They've ran record labels, toiled away in countless bands, played host to punk-minded pseudo-orphanages, magnetized touring acts, so forth and so on. With the grassroots torches still ablaze, the four of them now live together in a quaint little duplex on one of downtown's lesser-known tree-lined streets. It's not the typical band house type ordeal. There are no piss bottles, all-night ragers, or interfamilial fist fights. On the contrary, it's the type of evolutionary living situation

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for *Rumble Fish* that easily stands on its own and complements the film it was made for, a rare feat. Beyond a mere collection of songs, the *Rumble Fish* OST delivers, fine, strange music produced, for the most part, by one man.

Burned My Bridges So I Could See: *Antaeus*; *Blood Libels*; *Birchville Cat Motel*; *Our Love Will Destroy The World*; *Blut Aus Nord*; *The Mystical Beast of Rebellion*; *Seam*; *Headsparks*; *Tommyrot*, everything.



Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Grubbs (EG)

Stereophonics, *Word Gets Around*. In late '97 I had had enough of bands being praised as the next Oasis, Verve, or Blur. That's my best excuse for why I rolled my eyes at the Stereophonics when I saw their "Traffic" video on *120 Minutes*. I thought, "Here's yet another band with a singer singing into a microphone positioned at his forehead instead of his mouth. That, coupled with an anti-climactic ballad... no thanks!" Thankfully, when the band's second album, *Performance and Cocktails*, came out stateside, V2 sent out a college radio sampler with tracks from both albums. Being immediately struck by *Word Gets Around's* "Local Boy in the Photograph," I wanted to hear more. Despite some lackluster records in the last few years, *Word Gets Around* and *Performance and Cocktails* are still really strong. But it's *Word* that I think of in the highest. Songs like "A Thousand Trees," "More Life in a Tramps Vest," "Not Up to You," and "Same Size Feet" tell tales from small, working class towns. Subjects like suicide, murder, affairs, and pub life aren't really that pleasing to hear about, but the band has a way of making them work in their tuneful songs. Frontman Kelly Jones has a raspy/bluesy voice that can turn people off, but I just can't picture his style working with anyone else. This is definitely a record worth trading your copy of *Be Here Now* for.

Are we the people?: Explosions in the Sky, *All of a Sudden I Miss Everyone* (reviewed in this issue); Paper Chase, *the, God Bless Your Black Heart*; Scott Walker, *Boy Child*; Death Cab for Cutie, *Plans*; Metallica, *St. Anger*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Ari Joffe (AJ)

Hank Williams, *Alone With His Guitar*. Released by Mercury Records in 2000, this album collects various recordings made between 1949 and 1952 by Hank on his home recording equipment. As the title suggests, it's just Hank singing a collection of covers and originals with only his guitar for accompaniment. If it's not the most soulful music ever made (that's up for grabs), it's certainly in the top five. The deal with Hank is that the dude really went through all the sorrow, heartache, and pain that he wrote and sang about. (Rather than get into all that here, I'd advise folks to check out Colin Escott's biography on the man for more info on his personal turmoil. Let's just say the guy had Kurt Cobain or that guy from Joy Division that offed himself beat by a mile.) It's plainly audible in his voice on songs like "They Burdens are Greater Than Mine," "Cool Water," or, my favorite track on this disc, "Weary Blues From Waiting." There are a number of compilations of Hank's big hits out there that are great as well. He recorded at a time when singles were big, not albums, so various record companies keep packaging and repackaging the same tracks. But this is the one to start with if you're not all that familiar with his music. It's Hank at his purest, and in my opinion, Hank Williams Sr. is the greatest American songwriter of all time. Forget Dylan or whoever else. They're good, don't get me wrong, but they ain't Hank. (AJ)

Just trusting you was my great sin: *Droids Attack, All Your Chicks are Belong to Us*; *Hammerlock, True Grit: The First Five Years* (reviewed this issue); *Waylon Jennings, RCA Country Legends*; *Grateful Dead, the, Workingman's Dead*; *Indian, The Unquiet Sky*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Chay Lawrence (CL)

Corrosion of Conformity, *Animosity*. While I can't pretend to have picked up *Animosity* on its release date, I remember vividly the day I did add it to my burgeoning stack of albums. It was the Saturday after Slayer's *South of Heaven* was released. I rushed to the local record store to score a copy on cassette and happened to see the Corrosion of Conformity (COC) LP staring out at me from the rack (cassettes: the *de rigueur* format of the 13 year-old circa '87. Thank god they didn't have *Animosity* on cassette, too...). Sure, I'd been meaning to check them out for a while, so it was inevitable that COC would soon take over from SOD & DRI as my favorite acronym-themed crossover band. Beating the Cro-Mags to the punch by a year, *Animosity* remains the definitive crossover album, the pinnacle of a short-lived (and much maligned) cross-pollination of hardcore and metal that would eventually resurface in the '90s as metalcore. While I don't think COC managed to keep a constant lineup for more than one album, there's little doubt in my mind that the trio of Mike Dean, Woody Weatherman, and Reed Mullin comprised the definitive version. Fusing the snotty hardcore speed of SSD and Void with thick slabs of proto-Sabbath sludge, COC succeeded where even the mighty Black Flag ran aground. Songs like "Prayer," "Intervention," and "Loss for Words" mash up lightning-fast hardcore, tortured breakdowns, and Weatherman's lommi-esque guitar solos into a mess of sound with a grim, post-industrial dystopia as a lyrical roadmap. Back then, it seemed as if I got all my band recommendations from stickers on Jeff Hanneman's guitars. Thanks, Jeff, for pointing me in the right direction. (CL)

A hustle in your hedgerow: *Zach Galifianakis, Live at the Purple Onion*; *Assuck, Anticapital*; *Weather Report, I Sing The Body Electric*; *Jean Michel Jarre, Oxygene*; *Damnation AD, No More Dreams of Happy Endings*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Marissa Magic (MM)

Neil Young, *On the Beach*. My parents were counter culture (not hippies) in Santa Cruz when Neil Young lived there, and to this day they wonder if he was the skuzzy dude they inched away from at the bar. When I think

and sax jams. Awkward lyrics, asynchronous with the grooves, discredited some clever hooks, slick riffs, and the frontwoman's feistiness. Are these ripples predicated wave number four, or will it pass if we pretend we don't hear anything? (KG)

Planet A, PO Box 765, Amsterdam, NY 12010

Hot Snakes—*Thunder Down Under*, CD

Subtitled *Live at the ABC, Thunder Down Under* is an incendiary live document of a band at the top of its game. The song selection leans heavily toward the second and third albums, and there's a silly, off-the-cuff cover of "Rock 'n' Roll Will Never Die," which seems wasteful to me when I think of some killer songs from the first album that aren't included. That's my only criticism, though, and it's a little one. The recording is top notch and the performance is balls out, so songs like "Braintrust," "Think About Carbs," and "LAX" are much more powerful than their studio versions, while the moody "Suicide Invoice" is downright sinister. This makes me regret missing them the last time they toured. (JC)

Swami, PO Box 620428, San Diego, CA 92162, swamirecords.com

Illuminati—*On Borrowed Time*, CD

What High on Fire did for metal, the Illuminati do for down-home Southern rock, which makes it even more of a surprise that they hail from the Great White North. Badass wall-of-guitars and roaring, guttural vocals pile drive over boogie-woogie rhythms straight out of Sweet Home Toronto. There's a lot of talk about hipster metal and different genre tags, but the fact of the matter is that what Illuminati is turning out is down-low, sludgy rock that hearkens back to Artimus Pyle and company—provided you can hear the influence through the thick roar of guitars. This makes me wish I still had a car, so I could barrel down Highway 5 blasting this. Absolutely kickass. (PMD)

Liquor and Poker Music, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne CA 90250, theilluminati.net

Killed by the Bull—*The Princess Rides the Bull Into Holy Hell*, CD

The second effort from *Killed by the Bull* is a great short player. Time to cop out on this one, but there is no choice: When this was playing on the computer, two people on different occasions said it sounds like *Against Me!* with a different singer. I don't hear it that much but can understand why it was said. *The Princess Rides the Bull...* contains six tracks of mid-tempo rock with enough quiet acoustic parts and loud screaming parts to mix up the listening. The vocals are upfront enough to hear the lyrics, which is nice when the band actually has something to say. Don't be afraid of the short length of this EP; it's much better to get six great songs than a 12-song CD filled out with throwaway tracks. (EA)

Koi, 18600 South Parkview #1836, Houston, TX 77084, koirecords.com

Lambchop—*Damaged*, CD

True story: I've had close to a handful of opportunities to listen to the work of Lambchop (courtesy of my old radio station), and never taken them. Either it wasn't the right time or I lacked the requisite interest, and so on. But now, with their latest sitting in my lap and waiting for review, there were no excuses left. Mostly the outlet of lead Kurt Wagner, Lambchop has

been around for over 20 years now, and *Damaged* is their ninth full-length effort. Overall, it's pleasant and eclectic enough, comforting while remaining a bit odd. While based in Nashville, their influences reach beyond the scope of a lap-steel guitar into the realms of violins, piano, and even the occasional electronic sample. Basically, this is Americana without the actual rock portion of that equation, as this is all slowed down, contemplated, and simmered. While Lambchop has received a decent amount of critical adoration over the years, there remains a deal breaker here: Wagner's voice. He uses a slow, mumbled drawl, and half the time the words audibly swim around in his mouth for a bit before actually leaving, similar to what I might imagine Bill Callahan of Smog might sound like in his sixties. Otherwise, *Damaged* is pretty country pop that attempts to find meaning through smooth, controlled output. The group truly shines on "Prepared [Z]" and "Fear," when the accompanying flourishes move in time with the sentiment, but outside of those, it seems to fall under the old category of merely pleasant at best. After such a long wait, I have to say I was hoping for a bit more. (SMB)

Merge, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, mergerecords.com

Landmine Marathon—*Wounded*, CD

Landmine Marathon dallies in metal/grindcore or grindbore, if you will. Lots of metal, double bass, and garbled screaming, repeat over and over. The formulas of hardcore and metal have become parallel to mainstream pop: most bands have a strict formula and simply fill in the blanks, Madlibs style. Landmine Marathon has those monotone goblin vocals, chug-chug breakdowns, blastbeat passages, and of course, flat metal production that throws a sheen of artifice over everything. The artwork is middle-school Trapper Keeper: disembodied limbs, scarred bodies, and lots of red on black. I have reviewed what seems to be an infinite number of metalcore CDs this issue and the music is one long smear of pedestrian chum. This is a sonic representation of the banality of evil. I've been bludgeoned to sleep. (SC)

Level-Plane, levelplane.com

Leather Uppers, the—*Bright Lights*, CD

The latest album by the Leather Uppers is a collection of 13 good-time party tunes from two Canadian dandies who play stripped-down rock 'n' roll with an emphasis on fun. Ridiculousness is apparent from the get-go, as the album kicks off with a song called "Wizard's Castle," which itself starts out with the singer spelling out the word "wizard." They revisit the subject of wizardry near the album's end in "Sexy Wizard," and in between are songs like "Scream If You're High" and "Sexy Time." You might surmise that this isn't a serious-minded affair, and you'd be right. But in these trying times, it's important to lighten up once in a while and have fun just for the sake of it. That's what the Leather Uppers are all about. (JC)

Goner, 2151 Young Ave, Memphis, TN 38104, goner-records.com

Like a Fox—*S/T*, CD

The self-titled debut album from Philadelphia/New Jersey quintet, Like a Fox (LAF), is such a tease. The album's first two songs unfold with an enigmatic air that defies easy categorization. On "Nobody Knows You," playful electronic patter bounds through swirl-

ing synth movements until a jagged bassline rips the tune open and reveals a synth-pop band in the middle of some good vibrations. The acoustic guitar-led "A Little" is just as inviting, cleverly wrapping listeners in both up-close and distant drones and singer Jay Laughlin's upper octaves. But as quickly as Like a Fox giveth, they taketh away. Tracks three through 11 reveal LAF's blatant affection for bands like the Flaming Lips, Grandaddy (a pleasant Flaming Lips knockoff anyway), and Mercury Rev with undeniably derivative arrangements and execution. And though these similarities aren't the end of the world, it makes it difficult to listen to the album without hearing their predecessors. Still, Like a Fox offer a few tunes too satisfying to dismiss, like the ecstatic dream pop of "Kingdom Come" and the laid back "R 'n' R Weekend." Perhaps someday Like a Fox will eclipse their forefathers, capitalizing on the spark of creativity flitting through their self-titled debut. Until then, they'll be the band people mistake for their more famous peers. (SRM)

Tappersize, tappersize.com

Lola Ray—Liars, CD

This is one of those bands that do the three-part choruses: a quiet buildup, a loud, pouring-out-your-heart part, and then some kinda sad/triumphant conclusion (whiny vocals throughout). So really there are three hooks . . . a hook for everyone! There are moments of reverb-drenched simple guitar solos, and these are OK. It's almost like this kid is writing a song and keeps being like "there's not enough Cure/Smiths/Radiohead/whatever influence in this," which only translates to a boring record with a ripped-off Cure beat. The only exciting part of Liars is the chorus to "This House," but even then the rest of the song is overwrought with whiny vocals and drumming that sounds like the drummer wishes he were in a metal band, but he has to tone it down for Lola Ray. Annoying. It sounds like the type of music that would be in the romantic scene or the heart-breaking scene in a sitcom, not the one where the guy wins the race. (MM)

Benevolent Records, no contact info provided

Lords - In Tongues, 7"

Kodan Armada. Here's a band I thought I'd never hear from again. From what I can tell, at least two dudes from Armada are in Lords. Time has passed, so the boys have moved on from their screamo roots but not so completely that there isn't a little influence of their former band. However, Lords showcases a new, more rock, post-screamo sound. I like it. The songs are solid and the little melodic parts this band writes always get me. Surely worth your time if you're a former Kodan Armada fan. It's on Hyperrealist records, but I'm also giving you the Level-Plane address, because I'm pretty sure all the Hyperrealist mail order goes through them now. (KM)

[Hyperrealist](http://hyperrealist.com), hyperrealist.com, level-plane.com

Mecca Normal—The Observer, CD

If you must compare Jean Smith to another musician, you'd say "Patti Smith." It makes a kind of sense—both women look a little alike, i.e. androgynous and dark-haired, and they both sing with a similarly fierce caterwaul. And although Mecca Normal's lyrics are rarely as surreal as Patti Smith's, both bands give a serious,

political edge to almost every song they sing (most of Mecca Normal's edges are mostly Green). So sometimes you get a song you can stand behind but don't want to dance to (or worse, want to hear twice). There are an un-danceable few on *The Observer*, but more significant is Smith's brave, near-dogged candor. She wrote most of these songs about her experiences with online dating, and the pieces themselves are fiercely feminist, exasperated and angry, with an occasional kind gentility. You could call them narratives, especially with the touches of (surprisingly un-ham-handed) metaphor: cheap underwear, caribou, telephone . . . but you'd be wrong because you can't really pin Jean Smith down. Just listen, and think. (MC)

Kill Rock Stars, 120 NE State Ave #418, Olympia WA 98501, killrockstars.com

Michael Zapruder's Rain of Frogs—New Ways of Letting Go, CD

There are some albums I listen to over and over again because I love the lyrics. Others that feature rhythms and riffs that my heart thump or my head bop. Then there are discs like Michael Zapruder's Rain of Frogs *New Ways of Letting Go*, that, even though I have no idea what's going on, I can't stop listening to. It's as if Zapruder and his San Francisco-area Frogs ensemble made it up as they went along. "Let's start out with some trippy vocals, and then throw in some pretty background vocals, and then some slide guitar, and then some violins and tambourine. Now add some triangle. And then let's top it off with some . . . I don't know . . . darinets! C'mon, you know you want to!" Despite this seemingly haphazard approach, it comes together in a disc that's, at times, confusing but still fantastic overall. The airy tracks and the psychedelic feel make me miss San Francisco, and I've never even been there. (SSW)

Howells Transmitter, 2839 24th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, howells.transmitter.com

Minor Leagues, the—The Pestilence is Coming, CD

Billed as a concept album following a "storyline of love, loss, and French Canadians," the Minor Leagues' fourth LP plays like an epic musical, an indie-pop chronicle beginning when young Mary finds an ancient rock in the woods . . . and it seeps toxic gas into the Cincinnati air. Yes, the narrative yarn is silly, but with contributions from 40 musicians, horns and handclaps, and pop production as plush as Phil Spector's, this album demonstrates that, gimmicks aside, the Minor Leagues have musical ambition and character to spare. The album's main dilemma is that, while the songs do at least have choruses, the lyrics don't mean much separated from the context of the plot, and so it's difficult to say if the songs would bear repeat listens or stand alone as singles. That being said, the music does demonstrate the melodic prowess of Apples in Stereo and the mod pop bliss of the Monkees, while integrating orchestration, marching bands, and glee choirs. I'd say the Minor Leagues might be primed to write the next great pop album if in the future they would embrace the first-person pronoun and resist the temptation of shtick. (KG)

datawaslost.net

Modern Machines, the—Take It, Somebody!, CD

The Modern Machines' mission statement appears in the song "Cheap Rent, Cheap Beer, Cheap Shots." "I just wanna dance," Nato Paisano sings. "I just wanna

into which all of us semi-counterculture dirtballs could hope to gracefully grow. Josh Staples (vocals, bass) and Sara Sanger (guitars, vocals) are married and have a couple of cats. Matthew Izen (guitars) and Julia Lancer (drums) are not romantically involved, but they live upstairs and also have a cat. More importantly, while the real world continues to offer up its sugarcoated brand of arsenic, all four members, despite being relatively strapped, remain diligently committed to an ethos of productivity, progression, and protest. The full-length follow up to the band's 2004 EP release, *We are Fast Moving Motherfuckers, Dark is the Path That Lies Before Us* is an enchanting amalgamation of modern indie-rock, classic-pop melody, and everything you loved about post-punk's origins. Managing to maintain the fundamental characteristics of their sound while breaking free of formulation, the band abandons one the integral rules of engagement from their first record and now embraces songs that stretch beyond the two-minute mark. The result is a set of tracks that always remain consistently interesting, but never drag on. Bearing rich dynamic complexity and straight-on accessibility is a rare ability, and the New Trust have a knack for it. Path's guitars weave in angular counter-parted interplay and seamlessly return to blistering power chords; Staples' alto swoons, complemented by Sanger's PJ Harvey-esque bellows, while frame working drum and low-end syncopation keep the crash course navigation grounded. Lyrically, the New Trust's songs have the general tone of apocalyptic triumph and peril, while still maintaining some relevance. If "I pledge allegiance to the fags / the immigrants / the drunks / the disenfranchised punks" doesn't get your heart beating, then what will? Thirteen bangers in under 40 minutes. Here's an unstoppable one for the soft ones, calloused ones, little ones, and the jaded prog-punks who need some light on their way down the road less traveled. (BM)

Slowdance, PO Box 11223, Portland, OR 97211, slowdance.com



Oxbow—Love That's Last: A Wholly Hypnotic & Disturbing Work Regarding Oxbow, CD

Oxbow's *Love That's Last* could be the most interesting, out-there record that I have received since working at Punk Planet. I don't even know what to say about this album. Oxbow is a band with which I wasn't previously familiar—apparently they've been around since the late 1980s and released records on SST and Neurot. Somehow, they slipped through the cracks and never reached my virginial ears. Yes, my Oxbow cherry was popped very recently, and I'm hooked. How would I describe them? Well, in musical terms, I'd say: improv-blues-rock-noise-industrial-spoken-word-gothic-free-form-avant-garde-stoner-metal. In non-musical terms: think of a tornado tearing up a poetry club and a methadone clinic, and slamming it on top of a steel factory. And then comes the wrecking ball to tear the whole mess down, hitting the building 37 times. Think Daniel Higgs fronting a Neurosis-influenced jazz group. Think unnerving and dark, industrial and beautiful. Yeah, that's Oxbow for you. Four dudes, fronted by a rambling, gigantic black man who looks to be a male model, and perhaps the last person on this planet that I would assume to be fronting a band like Oxbow. Some of the songs are too much for me, and prove to be a bit unlistenable, but in general, this record rocks pretty hard. *Love That's Last* is a compilation of various Oxbow recordings, some dating back to 1988, and some as recent as 2002. A few of the songs are more spoken-word, a few of the songs are more noise/industrial (a la NYC, 1988), and a few are more rock-oriented (though nothing on this record is straightforward rock), but all together, it's a masterpiece of so-called "art-rock." "Is That What Sleep Looks Like," a song focused around a dark guitar line with singer Eugene Robinson adding obscure noises and pained vocals here and there, is my favorite track, and I was stunned to find that it was an improvised session. "Sunday," the final track on the record, is the most fist-pumping rock song. Interestingly, Steve Albini recorded it in 1993, and again, I am shocked that for all these years, this track passed me by. One of my favorite qualities in music is the art of repetition, and Oxbow has perfected this. Seriously, listen to these guys, and no matter whether you love them or hate them, they've done their job well. (MB)

[Hydra Head](http://hydrachead.com), PO Box 291430, Los Angeles, CA 90029, hydrachead.com



Reducers SF - Raise Your Hackles, CD

Reducers SF are one of those incredible bands that plug away for over a decade, only obtaining regional and subgenre recognition despite touring internationally. I approached their new full length, *Raise Your Hackles*, with apprehension. Up to this point, one of the band's distinguishing factors was that their second album, 2001's *Crappy Clubs and Smelly Pubs*, was a rare sophomore release that blew away their already kick-ass debut record. It struck me that five years is an awfully long time to take to record another album, but *Raise Your Hackles* far exceeds all expectations. It's another instant classic by this distinctive oi-influenced street punk band. Mid-tempo street punk tends to be riddled with machismo, but earnest, somber vocals make Reducers SF an oddly sensitive band. They already went against the oi grain with anti-war and personal lyrics on their prior releases, and they continue the trend with 13 awesome new songs on this new album. From the comical "Knocked Out," outlining the story of a wannabe fighter with a penchant for getting his ass kicked, to the overtly political "Who's to Blame," Reducers SF continue to grow. Even on the more typically working class song "Hired Hand," Reducers SF display an elevated sense of maturity. The music is still very basic, but there are interesting uses of two guitars that lend many of the songs complexity, although always within a fundamental structure. There are virtually no lead guitar lines, or at least not ones typically associated with a five-piece rock band. There's an underlying seriousness to the project that reeks of a group trying to go out with a bang. I'd like to think that the word that *Raise Your Hackles* is the final album by Reducers SF is only a rumor, but if it turns out that way, at least they ended on a high note. (AE)

TKO, 8941 Atlanta Ave #505, Huntington Beach, CA 92646, tkorecords.com

REVIEWER SPOTLIGHTS

of *On the Beach* in terms of its parts, it's a mostly acoustic record with harmonicas and dudes jamming out and whining about their shit, I totally hate everything about it. I don't like whiny dudes or acoustic guitars or jams or long songs or harmonicas. Regardless, Neil Young manages to defy all of that. Maybe it's because this was the soundtrack to my childhood. Or maybe it's because he comes across as just some guy who wrote some songs—the skuzzy dude at the end of the bar humming to himself. *On the Beach* is really bleak, but in an almost comforting way, as though things will continue to move on. The whole recording sounds casual and spur-of-the-moment—all fuzzy and lo-fi and intimate. On the title track, he sings, "Though my problems are meaningless / I can't make them go away," and it's all sadness and shame and no bullshit. "Ambulance Blues," the last track on the album, is long and laden with harmonicas; it moves along slowly and sadly, and all I can do is stare and cry—everything is falling apart, there's nothing you can do about it except keep plodding forward.

Yr. all just pissin' in the wind: Magick Markers, Feel the Crayon; Dusty Springfield, A Girl Called Dusty; Kiosk, Growing Pains; Sonic Youth, Washing Machine; Outkast, Speakerboxx.

Reviewer Spotlight: Justin Marcinak (JM)

Avalanches, the, Since I Left You. Imagine immigrants from around the world waiting to register with Ellis Island authorities who usher the immigrants onto another boat. Imagine the vessel is a cruise liner operated by the cast of *The Love Boat* and DJ Shadow.

Now, in this scenario, replace the authorities with the Avalanches, a sextet of Australian DJs and musicians, substitute a diverse array of samples for the immigrants, and consider the vacation voyage to be a record called *Since I Left You*. Now you have an idea of how the Avalanches' postmodern masterpiece sounds. It uses enough cleared samples to fill two-thirds of a panel on the CD case with credits printed in 4- or 5-point font. The Avalanches, however, organize every last one into a single sonic pleasure cruise. Nothing sounds foreign or out of place, thanks to the album's concept: taking a holiday. "Get a drink," the first vocal sample says. "Have a good time now. Welcome to paradise." The group mixes the bass line to Madonna's "Holiday," samples about booking flights and departing flights, and clips of waves crashing and ships' foghorns belowing. Such thematic samples, as well as the album's live instrumentation and continuity, unite all the other disparate samples: neighing horses, ricochetting gunshots, Spanish guitar, French vocals, oohs, yeahs, brassy bursts, and hip-hop beats. The diversity of sounds and tempos encourages a range of feelings, and the album absorbs any adjective that describes a good vacation: relaxing, sweaty, spiritual, and—to quote Madonna—"so nice."

Positive jams: Lupe Fiasco, Lupe Fiasco's Food & Liquor; the Hold Steady, Almost Killed Me; Neko Case, Fox Confessor Brings the Flood; the Knitters, The Modern Sounds of the Knitters; Girl Talk, Night Ripper.

Reviewer Spotlight: Krystle Miller (KM)

PJ Harvey, To Bring You My Love. I think someone (possibly me; it's been a long time and I just don't remember) spotlighted PJ's *Is This Desire* already. I'm always pretty surprised more people aren't into her the way they are Sonic Youth, Björk, or Radiohead. Here's an artist who is consistently creating amazing albums, changing her image/style, pushing the envelope, and defining what it means to be a great artist. *To Bring You My Love* is PJ's third album and arguably her most well known, as it received a ton of critical acclaim in 1995 when it was released. Maybe you remember the weird video for "Down by the Water," too? Like "Down by the Water," the rest of the record is dark, deep, and full longing for hope—there aren't many, if any, glimpses of hope in the songs, but sometimes people just want to revel in their depression and don't want a ray of sunshine shining through their cave of solitude. As with any PJ record, the songs range from acoustic to atmospheric alterna-rock, all held together by Flood's excellent production and PJ's amazing voice. This should be a staple in every music fan's music collection, and don't make up excuses 'cause you can find this record for \$7 in the used bin at your local record store.

Currently listening to: Deerhunter, Cryptograms; Of Montreal, Hissing Fauna . . . ; Sonic Youth, Goo; Broadcast, Tender Buttons; Landmine Marathon, Wounded (reviewed this issue).

Reviewer Spotlight: Steve Mizek (SRM)

Kraftwerk, Autobahn. It's difficult to overstate the importance of Kraftwerk's 1974 opus, *Autobahn*. From its gently loping drones and electronic textures sprung the seeds for a great deal of electronic music we listen to today, opening the door for the synth-pop bands and electro groups who dominated the '80s. Only a year after their third album, *Ralf and Florian*, Kraftwerk transcended the kraut-rock scene they had helped spawn with Neu, Can, Tangerine Dream, and Manuel Göttsching by honoring the intensely efficient *Autobahn* and the gratifying experience of driving on it. The epic titular track was precisely layered with warm melodies bubbling from early model synths, touched up with drum machine patter, and capped off with the group's halcyon vocal harmonies. Subsequent tracks shift back and forth between moods, from the regal fanfare of "Kometenmelodie 2" to the murky dread of "Mitternacht," then balancing the atmosphere with the serene, synthesized nature scene of album closer, "Morgenspaziergang." While Kraftwerk would go on to create more distinctly synth-pop records that directly influenced the birth of techno and electro, *Autobahn* will be remembered as the serene drive that started it all.

I've also been listening to: Black Devil Disco Club, 28 Later; Lindstrøm, It's a Feedelity Affair; Moodymann, Silentintroduction; Paperclip People, The Secret Tapes of Dr. Eich; Depeche Mode, Violator.

dance / don't wanna' make the rules." The Modern Machines is the kind of garage band that formed for the right reasons: a love of straight-up rock, to express universally shared emotions (often caused by girls), and for fun. Better yet, *Take It, Somebody!* clearly reveals all of those motivations fueling the music. The band doesn't even need to resort to lame jokes to make its music fun. Instead, the trio subtly weaves winking lines into the lyrics. On one hand, *Take It, Somebody!* encourages listeners to go out, buy a couple PBRs, watch the Modern Machines play in the corner of the dive on Friday night, and then eat Mexican food at 2 am. On the other hand, the album, which is neither too polished nor sloppy, suggests that a record isn't the ideal medium to showcase the band. (JM) *Dirtnap*, 2615 SE Clinton St., Portland, OR 97202, dirtnaprecs.com

Nazi Dogs—Chase the Man, CD

The spirit of 1977 is living on with the Nazi Dogs, hailing from Germany. There's absolutely no new ground being broken on *Chase the Man*. This is totally recycled, ripped-off punk rock that your parents loved, and frankly it's a blast to hear. Without the aspirations of making it big or creating a hit record, the Nazi Dogs did what is missing from punk rock these days—they had fun. There is no pretending to be arty, musical, or creative . . . just punk rock blasting away on cheap equipment. A trio of covers thrown in by the likes of the Pagans and Devo keep the party going. A simple scan of song titles such as "Chase the Man," "Detention Zone," and "Neutrons" reveals the simplicity and beauty of a band like the Nazi Dogs. They were touring with bigger bands before they even had a release out there to peddle. Hopefully, TKO records sells enough to put more releases out without trying to turn the Nazi Dogs into something they aren't. This one is highly recommended, and if you are disappointed then you don't have a soul. (EA)

TKO, 1841 Atlanta Ave. #505, Huntington Beach, CA 92646, tkorecords.com

Norrisman—Home & Away, CD

Although I do enjoy and own a handful of reggae records, I'm hardly the greatest judge of modern reggae artists. Norrisman makes no bones about taking a modern approach to the genre, decked out in computer-made beats and back-up vocals from several female vocalists. He alternates between more R&B crooning and rapid-fire toasting, but he's a bit better at the latter, as his voice cracks between octaves and wavers on sustained pitches. Despite its inoffensive shine, *Home & Away* will likely have trouble finding an audience here in the States where the only reggae people about know is Bob Marley and whatever dancehall his sons inflict upon the radio. Hardcore fans will probably also take issue with his mediocre songwriting, repetitive nature, and overly glossy production. I will kindly hand my copy to the nearest CD resale shop and browse for anything else. (SRM) *Greensleeves*, greensleeves.net

One for the Team—Good Boys Don't Make Noise, CD

It is difficult to imagine how exactly Ian Anderson is able to keep up with his own life. Aside from being a student and running a successful record label (started when he was a fresh-faced 18 year-old), he has

somehow found enough time to start a second band in the form of One for the Team. Featuring power pop with plenty of ba-ba-ba choruses and handclaps, these tracks were made for those sunshiny summer moments. Taking a 180-degree turn from his other material in *Aneuretical*, the name of the game here is accessible pop, but thankfully, it is far from boring. "Tame the Beast" is one standout track, while the preamble to the album, "Robert's Rules of Order," is blatant self-aware ambition, laying out everything from reasons for creating the album to beating the critics to the punch at second-guessing the effort. There are plenty of cascading vocals, churning guitars, and a pop sensibility that's sweeter than a can of frosting. It is a super energetic, upbeat, and amateurishly self-aware record, full of head-bobbing pop anthems. Chalk it up as another success for Afternoon, and certainly one of the better debuts I've heard in awhile. One for the Team is sure to become a staple of the Minneapolis clubs soon enough, and it is only a matter of time before they get hand-plucked to open for the Hopefuls. Consider yourself charmed. (SBM) *Afternoon*, 222 W. 25th St., Minneapolis, MN 55404, afternoonrecords.com

One Shot Left—Restitution, CD

One Shot Left (OSL) is part of a new crop of bands melding the influences of metal, hardcore, and pop punk into heavy blasts of ear-catching rock. Hailing from a small town in Alberta, Canada, this foursome has knocked around the scene since the late 1990s. *Restitution*, the band's second full-length album, is filled with "Social commentaries" that are heavier on riffs than on compelling statements. While plowing through metallic progressions fitting of early *Thrice* or even *Boy Sets Fire*, OSL is quick to switch gears and bust out sunshine hooks and nasal harmonies that call *Saves the Day* and *New Found Glory* touchstones. Though the soaring vocals give the band much of its accessibility, OSL often focus on stretched-out instrumental sections with meandering guitar leads longer than most bands of this ilk are willing to do or are capable of playing. This works for and against them, as it shows off both their chops and their limitations. Lyrically, OSL is kind of weak. Handling emotionally charged subject matter with detached generalities and sloppy, high school poetic notions, Jeff Barrett's words thus have a difficult time resonating with audiences; no matter how engaging he manages to be. Aside from their instrumentally inclined arrangements, *One Shot Left* has trouble distinguishing itself from the growing ranks of bands working this fusion of styles. Given a few broken hearts and some college level writing classes might make a difference, but on *Restitution*, listeners get back little worth keeping or remembering. (SRM) *Meter*, 10816 Macleod Trail SE Calgary, Alberta T2J 5N8 Canada, meterrecords.com

Outbreak—Failure, CD

So far I've liked every *Outbreak* release, and *Failure* is no different. They keep assembling record after record of fast and catchy hardcore. Writing an entire album of hardcore tunes can be a daunting and disastrous task, but *Outbreak* has pulled it off multiple times. These guys have some serious songwriting chops. It's all here . . . the total package. The songs are played well, the vocals fit perfectly. Lyrically, it's not groups of ridiculous

cliches and the layout looks great. As dorky as it might sound to say this, Bridge Nine is one of the more consistent labels around right now. They found their niche years ago and stuck with it. Keep putting out great records, and I'll keep paying attention. (DA)

Bridge Nine, bridge9.com

Outline, the—You Smash It, We'll Build Around It, CD

On their Fearless Records debut, *You Smash It, We'll Build Around It*, the Outline tries their hand at a few conflicting sounds, none of which really work for them. Some tracks are bass/drums/synth-driven abominations, some have an off-time, prog feel, and others are aimed toward getting people to dance but aren't catchy enough to pull it off. Honestly, where the Outline shines are dream-inducing tracks soaked in synth and digital delay like "Why We're Better Now" and the opener, "Aesthetics." If they played up these strengths and toned down their tendency to sound like several different bands during any given song, they'd have something good on their hands. (SK)

Fearless, 11785 Cardinal Circle Garden Grove, CA 92843, fearless-records.com

Pink Reason—Cleaning the Mirror, LP

Anyone who has talked to me for more than five minutes in the past six months has more than likely been bombarded with my undying praise for Pink Reason's debut 7" from last year. It was, quite possibly, my favorite release of the year. It was three songs of perfection on a vinyl slab. Send inquiries to the mosfots at Criminal IQ to obtain a copy. *Cleaning the Mirror* doesn't just pick up where the 7" left off, it soars to astronomically higher levels of greatness. There are equally large soft spots in my heart for really dark music and folky home tapers-styled stuff. In the rare instance that a band embodies both criteria, my mind is completely blown. Offhand, the only two that come to mind are Death in June and Pink Reason. The album opens up with the slow burner "Goodbye." It stretches out for six minutes of echo-y vocals and mesmerizing guitar interplay. "Motherfucker" follows it up in a similar manner. The side is completed with the sparse rhythms and guitar repetition of "Storming Heaven." The B-side opens up with my favorite of the album, "Dead End." Sonically, it reminds me of Bee Thousand-era Guided by Voices. Toward the end of the song the soul-bearing vocals really set it apart from the others. As the album draws to a close, "Up the Sleeve," with its added instrumentation of saxophone and banjo, really brings it to a triumphant ending. (DA)

Siltbreeze, 727 S. 7th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147, siltbreeze.com

Pointed Sticks—Waiting for the Real Thing, CD

The Pointed Sticks are Nardwuar the Human Serviette's all-time favorite Vancouver punk band, and chances are you've never heard of them. Although they were only together for three short years, the Pointed Sticks released three classic singles that rank among the best power pop records of all time. Those singles were so good they attracted the attention of the venerable Stiff Records, which quickly signed the band to an album deal. After recording the LP in London in early 1980, Stiff decided, for various reasons, to shelve the release. The band returned home and recorded the Perfect Youth LP, an inconsistent collection

of songs by a band seemingly confused as to their next step. That confusion led to their breakup shortly after the album's release, and so went another band into that cold, dark night. Since then, their songs have been covered by the likes of the Smugglers, the Fastbacks, and most recently the Methodones, and a small but devoted following has continued to whisper their name in reverence. If enough people hear this new release, it's doubtless that the greatness of the Pointed Sticks won't be so much of a secret anymore. *Waiting for the Real Thing* collects the three singles, along with demos, live cuts, radio sessions, and highlights from their lone LP. At the very least, this would be worth picking up solely for the first six songs, the A- and B-sides of those lauded 45s. Thankfully, the other 18 songs here (and hidden bonus tracks) are consistently strong too, and as you listen you can't help but wonder what might have become of the Pointed Sticks if things would've gone just a little bit differently all those years ago. Highly recommended. (JC)

Death Records, Cascades PO Box 43001, Burnaby, BC V5G 3H0, Canada, suddendeath.com

Reacher, Geoff—Avec Reacher C'est Plus Sûr, CD

Geoff Reacher's backstory is a common one in music: A small town guy leaves his native state (in this case, Texas) for cultural Mecca New York City where he's able to create without ridicule. And like many of the musicians with whom he shares this personal history, Reacher never found much acclaim, just more places to play out. A few spins of his latest album, *Avec Reacher C'est Plus Sûr*, provide insight as to why this was the case. Reacher's work is an uneasy combination of country roots and the eclectic, electronically-assisted songwriting championed best by Eels and Beck. Though a few of his sample-based beats have a certain lo-fi charm to them ("You Like My Song"), more often they clutter awkwardly against his rote fingerpicking and untrained tenor, a situation aided by Reacher's unusual choices of melodies. His lyrics, a mish-mash of nonsensical ramblings and booze-informed musings on relationships and death, offer listeners little to grab onto either. Perhaps experiencing the spectacle of Reacher assembling his songs live would be interesting enough to smooth over the tunes' shortcomings. But on *Avec Reacher C'est Plus Sûr*, Reacher's peculiar style lacks the attention-holding characteristics to keep listeners from reaching for the eject button. (SRM)

Orange Twin, 475 Forest Road, Athens, GA 30605, orangetwin.com

Scarecrows, the, Feat. Marc Ford—S/T, CD

The Scarecrows come with a pedigree, and one so fine I wish I liked them better. In the late '80s, the Southern California darlings (one of whom, Marc Ford, would later play with Ben Harper and the Black Crowes), had a decent cult-cum-critical following, and shared stages with everyone from Johnny Thunders to Husker Du and Gun Club. I appreciate the history and the pairing of backlash '60s blues with freaky screams and growls ("Secret Melody"), but the album feels more like homage than independent creation. This is fine—important even—but makes me wonder if I should've just listened to the Stones in the first place. Biggest bummer: the liner notes mention a song called "Ten Qualiaudes," apparently inspired by *The Catcher in the Rye*, but not included here. (MC)

Manic, 7095 Hollywood, Suite 633, Hollywood CA 90028, manic-records.com



These Arms Are Snakes—Easter, CD

I was fortunate to stumble upon These Arms Are Snakes at the start of their career. I saw them open at a show right before the release of their first EP and was instantly taken by them. It's rare that I would be so enamored of a band so quickly, but from the very first song, I knew they were something pretty special. They not only brought their own stage lights, but they also played with an energy and passion I seldom see in bands, especially newer bands. I immediately bought their EP, and it remained in my CD player for the better part of the following year. I played it for everyone I knew and tried to get everyone I knew to go see them. It seemed the band hit a rough spell afterwards, and members kept leaving for various reasons, until they finally settled on a steady lineup. Now These Arms Are Snakes have two full-length albums under their belt—Easter being the second. The sound on this album is not unlike their debut LP; the progression into slightly more experimental territory continues, but you'll hear the same angular, driving guitars and catchy keyboard lines. They have not lost one ounce of energy or their ability to shift gears in songs. There is no sophomore jinx here; this album is every bit as solid as the last. It not only delivers familiar elements that made me a fan in the first place, but it also branches out a bit more with diversity in song structures. Two perfect examples of this are the hooks in "Subtle Body" and especially "Abracadabra," two standout tracks on this album—the former building up to a big finish, similar to their greatest song ever, "Drinking From the Necks of the Ones You Love." While the band's musical progression remains interesting, the artwork for this release is pretty lackluster. I much prefer the cover to the first EP, one of favorite covers in recent times. Thankfully, the lyrics are printed legibly inside, which makes it easier to follow along. While I don't like every song on Easter, the standouts are easily as strong as anything from their previous records, and the band has only gotten better and more energetic in their recent live shows. I look forward to seeing where they go from here, as the trip so far has been nothing short of completely enjoyable. (MVG)

Jade Tree, jadetree.com



Thorn vs. Side—Arson, CDEP

Dude. One of the five songs from this EP *Arson* by Thorn vs. Side would sound pretty kickass on the mix I'm making for my friends and me on our drive to school. Not sure which one to rip and burn, though. The first track establishes the band's powerful sound, and the spoken-word fade-in foreshadows the high production values. Like a lot of other post-early-21st-Century-Vagrant-Records-emo-ish bands, Thorn vs. Side incorporates buzzing guitar chords and twitchy loud-to-quiet breaks into its arrangements. And as the second

song "The Debt We All Must Pay," demonstrates, the band can write really cool lead riffs. This track is so melodic that it could be a radio hit if the band receives the right attention. In fact, I can almost imagine this song in heavy rotation on Top-40 radio, if only the Matrix or Timbaland produced it. My friends might like this track the most, though, because we liked My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy more before those bands became so overexposed. By the way, Thorn vs. Side is not obnoxious mall punk, either, though the mallrats would probably love this music if they would just put down the 64-oz. Mr. Pibb and listen for a second. The next track, "The Pattern," begins with acoustic strumming but kicks into a pretty jittery rock song with a big chorus. Then, after the chorus, it flexes with some double bass drumming, and during the interlude, the band rawks out with more killer drumming and percussive bass picking. Awesome. "King Rhetoric" uses those loud-and-quiet dynamics, and it has some surprising harmony vocals. Then, there's this creepy coda about zombies or something. Maybe I won't burn that one because it interrupts the flow. The last track combines the techniques and sounds from the rest of the disc. You know what? I think I will text my snarky older cousin. He writes pretentious music reviews in his spare time. I'm going to challenge him not to enjoy this record. I bet he'll eat crow and write a serious review after initially pigeonholing this group as a wannabe-hardcore-yet-mainstream emo-punk band. After all, I know he secretly likes "Dance, Dance," and this EP is totally not wussy. (JM)

Mookie Dog, PO Box 40234, San Antonio, TX 78229, mookiedogrecords.com



Ward, M.—Post-War, CD

When M. Ward conceived his fine modern folk-rock album *Post-War*, he might have thought of the immortal words of Ferris Bueller: "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Of course, Ward probably wasn't thinking about a John Hughes movie while recording in an attic. For the most part, though, Bueller's admonition is the thesis of *Post-War*. Don't be deceived by the title; an album called *Post-War* in a time of war ain't necessarily a protest album. Initially, Ward seems to concern himself with sources and effects of trauma. Sure,

the speaker of "Right in the Head" could be fighting post-traumatic stress disorder. Aptly titled, "Requiem" is a blues song that would not sound inappropriate at the funeral of a soldier. But "Chinese Translation" follows men seeking answers to three questions including, "What do you do with the pieces of a broken heart?" The best therapy for all this trauma begins with realizing that all things must pass. A wise man addresses the questioning man in "Chinese Translation": "My time here is brief / so you'll have to pick just three." Ward's inquisitive character ultimately asks, "And if life is really as short as they say / then why is the night so long?" The specific answers aren't important, though. Understanding that time is brief and life is short is first aid for

REVIEWER SPOTLIGHTS

Reviewer Spotlight: Sarah Moody (SBM)

Aesop Rock, *Float*. Full of garbage myths and sharp lines on the industrial experience, you would be hard pressed to find a finer wordsmith in the world of hip hop than Ian Bavitz, AKA Aesop Rock. Over simple, dark beats, Ace Rock spits the rhymes of a damaged cynic with a heart as big as earth, only faster than is possible to follow logically. Each surreal snippet follows the next in an up and down chorus of thick wit and quick metaphor in a cadence and complexity that is truly unparalleled. As his follow up opus *Labor Days* would further capitalize on, *Float* begins to pay homage to fellow blue-collar, nine-to-five working martyrs. Harvests, honor, sacrifice, sleep, wings, dreams, urchins, and halo kibbles represent a handful of the recurring turn of phrases that only vaguely make sense within this quick-spotted catalogue of half-realized pipe dreams. The way words become condensed is something to behold. A snippet from the standout "Big Bang," "Sticky panoramic contaminant planted in conjunction with phantom assumption gutter-bug alumnus candidates." Most emcees would spend months coming up with a comparable line and still not be able to get halfway through it when tested. Plus, "Commencement at the Obedience Academy" is home to the most perfect insomniac mantra ("must not sleep / must warn others"), later to be tattooed on Bavitz' arms so there can be no mistake. If you're looking for somewhere to dig into his cartography, this is as good a spot as any. Start with "Television" and listen to the preacher close.

Sloshing: Flying Canyon, S/T; Haley Bonar, *Lure the Fox*; the Burning Paris, *Half-Truths & Indiscretions* (reviewed this issue); Clipse, *Hell Hath No Fury*; V/A, *The Dawn of Doo-Wop* box set.



Reviewer Spotlight: (Mr.) Dana Morse: (DM)

Naked Raygun, *Raygun... Naked Raygun*. In my last two years of high school, this 1990 release was in heavy rotation in my tape deck. Of course, so were Raygun's other releases. One thing that had changed that makes this album stick out a bit was that Naked Raygun's long time guitarist John Haggerty had left to be part of Pegboy and was replaced by Bill Stephens. Many criticized that this release was lacking the same edge that had made all the previous albums great. What the average listener didn't take into consideration was that Raygun had been heading into a more concrete style that lacked the same cathartic and off-kilter style that had made them legends. Stephens had some huge shoes to fill and did well regardless of the naysayer. Even more overlooked is that some of their best tunes also appear on this release like "Prepare to Die," "Home," "Terminal," and "Strange Days." Sure, there were fewer surprises, but this was one solid record. *Raygun... Naked Raygun* was a solid record of political, sci-fi-driven songs that had a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor that influenced many for years to come. Nobody can out-harmonize these guys or match that buzz saw guitar or the battery operated rhythm section.

What rocks the socks: Samiam, Whatever's Got You Down?; +/-, Let's Start a Fire; White Flag, History is Fiction; Girl Talk, Night Ripper; Top Ten and Converge (both reviewed this issue).



Reviewer Spotlight: Brian Moss (BM)

Crimpshrine, *The Sound of a New World Being Born*. Perhaps the most cult-adored punk band to have ever risen out of the East Bay's Gilman-centric community, Crimpshrine's raucous heart-on-their-sleeve severity, low-budget, grit-gargled recordings, and relentless commitment to DIY ethics both magnetized listeners and helped to spearhead the region's highly characterized pop-punk sound. The release of *The Sound of a New World Being Born* on Lookout Records in 1998, ensured that fans of the band's 7", EP, and compilation tracks could find everything they wanted in one place. Featuring the songwriting of Aaron Cometbus (Cometbus Zine, Pinhead Gunpowder, Cleveland Bound Death Sentence) and Jeff Ott (Fifteen) in their teenage years, Crimpshrine's signature intensity and diehard youthful idealism were at their finest on some of their harder-to-find material. While some folks can't stomach the band due to plentiful displays of technical mishap, for those of us who think that a good amount of sloppiness is integral to punk, embracing buzz-saw vocals and the occasional off-kilter drum fill comes naturally. Rampant with sing-a-longs, innovative dynamics (generally executed with noticeable struggle), and fearlessly honest (but painfully hopeful) lyrics, it's no wonder that the 18 tracks on *The Sound of a New World Being Born* provided inspiration (pun absolutely intended) for the band's generational peers and those who came after.

Do you feel me? The Eternals, *Heavy International*; Bonnie Prince Billy and Tortoise, *The Brave & the Bold*; Too Short, *Get in Where You Fit In*; the New Trust, *Dark is the Path That Lies Before Us*; Sonic Youth, *Rather Ripped*; Stiff Little Fingers; *Inflammable Material*.



Reviewer's Spotlight: Bart Niedzialkowski (BN)

Charles Romalotti, *Salad Days*. *Salad Days* is a book I consider to be one of the finest I have ever read, and so writing about it has proved difficult. Do yourself a favor and pick up a copy regardless of how this spotlight turns out. At the heart of the book lies a tale about a young kid in search of something more than the small town life he is accustomed to. It is also a stirring reminder of the power of music, friendship, and faith in yourself. It is a book that can make you laugh, cry, and provoke countless thoughts—often within the same chapter. Finally, I love its homage to the music scene. The book opens with "My best friend died today," and herein begins the journey into the past as Frank Smith, the protagonist, recalls his high school days. Smith is Holden Caulfield with a Mohawk—a little misguided and

Signal Home—*A Fragile Constitutional*, CD

This is primetime, manufactured punk rock for the masses, and it never sounded better. Screaming vocals overlap jabbing guitars (that get quiet at times). The word "emo" has evolved since the days of Rites of Spring, but I believe this is what the kids call emo these days. The production is absolutely top notch and is the loudest mastered disc that I've heard in a long time. Ten years ago this would have stood out with its overlapping layers of vocals and guitars. Time signatures change constantly, interrupted by many slow moments that break into a yelling match. In 2007, *A Fragile Constitution* sounds like the best we are going to get by an overdone genre. Without any doubt, Signal Home will end up on a Warped Tour and become the favorite band of high school girls across the country. Is that a bad thing? Not really ... they have a great sound and well-crafted pop-emo-punk songs that are worth the attention of a larger audience. (EA) Victory, 346 N. Justine St. Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, victory-records.com

Skyscraper Frontier—*Moonlit Behavior* CDEP

The first track from this LA quintet's debut might be the most deceiving introduction to a record you'll hear this year. Held together with a canned sample of electronic percussion, the album-opening "I Just Need You" revolves around swirling electronics, soaring guitar leads, and studio-scrubbed vocals—precisely the sort of predictable dance-floor pop you'd expect to hear in a club circa 1989. But the EP that follows that odd salutation feels like it's practically set in a different universe. The acoustic shuffle of "Your Hazy Mind," complete with weepy pedal-steel, conjures up Bob Dylan. Singer/guitarist Rus Martin pulls off an almost devastating Jeff Buckley/Jimmy Gnecco-style wail on the addictive rock hooks of "Catatonic Citizens" and the more atmospheric "I Know/You Know." The disc closes not with boilerplate pop but with the lonely moan of a piano in the hidden track "Alone at the Hospital." It's a truly impressive disc that leaves you waiting for more, if you don't judge the book by its first chapter. (JV) Coming Home, 233 Via Colinas, Westlake Village, CA 91362, cominghomerecords.com

Sleep Out—I Was Your Shroud, CD

Chicago has no shortage of excellent indie-pop/rock bands, but despite the wealth of talent here, only Sleep Out holds the crown for crafting one of the best debuts of 2006. The influence of '80s and '90s indie-pop is apparent throughout the record, but nothing on *I Was Your Shroud* is overly derivative or repetitive. Each song sounds fresh and new but cohesive in terms of the album. The jangly, sparkling guitars on tracks like "Island Park," and "It Wasn't Darkness" (which is probably my favorite song of the past year) are often coupled with a reverberating melancholy and perpetuated further by singer Quinn Goodwillie's airy voice. Both the production and lyrics are terrific and push great songs into even greater territory. *I Was Your Shroud* is an excellent record from start to finish and hopefully Sleep Out will gain the notoriety they deserve because of it. (SK) Zero One Infinity/March Records, 505 First Street, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11215

Sleeping, the—*Questions and Answers*, CD

There has been a good amount of ink spilled lately re-

garding the aesthetic of levels on a record. More specifically, the fact that with the advent of tiny computer speakers and crappy iPod headphones, bands have started to make their records sound louder in order to get some attention. Needless to say, such tactics are both unnecessary and in poor taste, as they cause the album to sound muddled and sloppy. It would seem, however, that certain bands just plain don't care about sonics. With stadium riffs and faux-tortured vocals, the Sleeping specializes in that special breed of testosterone-induced emo complete with a disco drum-beat. It is a strange dichotomy, to be sure, though it is becoming more and more apparent that people have become satisfied with sad imitations of At the Drive In, causing every 13-year-old on the planet to have an aggressive-suburbanite rock fetish. Questions and Answers does little more than compile every frustrating aspect of the "modern rock" of today and places it in a nice, creamy, unnecessarily aggressive package. When incorporating bongos onto a track becomes the only innovative aspect of the entire album, it becomes a little depressing. Furthermore, the guttural screaming thrown into the mix translates not as anguish, but an attempt to cover up the lack of anything but utterly leveled-out noise. There is nothing redeeming to be found here. Move on. (SBM) Victory, 346 N. Justine St. Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, victory-records.com

Snowglobe—*Oxytocin*, CD

Oxytocin is the first in a series of solo-directed albums by members of Snowglobe, and Snowglobe member Brad Postlethwaite wrote all of these songs. I have never heard Snowglobe before, or music from any of its members, but if *Oxytocin* is any indication of their prior work, I've been missing out. The album is a strong mix of songs that experiment with different construction and instrumentation, but not enough to sound non-cohesive or disorienting. The album starts strong with the title track, the lyrics of which rest inside the picture-puzzle of sorts donning the album's inside artwork. Think Classic Concentration set to music. The rest of the album follows suit, remaining playful with its slower tracks. For example, the centerpiece of "Cellos" is, well, cellos, and the backbone of "Piano" is, yep, pianos. It's nice that Postlethwaite doesn't take things so seriously, letting the music naturally flow without trying to fit into some pre-defined sound. Expressing quite a range—from lighthearted, carnival-esque dance songs to simple, well-written singalongs—Postlethwaite delivers good low-key pop rock and catchy melodies from start to finish. (AJA) Makeshift Music, makeshiftmusic.com

Sparrows Swarm and Sing – O'Shenandoah, Mighty Death Will Find Me, CD

Sparrows Swarm and Sing are a six-member outfit from the New England that plays an invigorated form of post rock that heavily relies on its strings and other classical instruments. There are violins, cellos, and xylophone, but these are backed by a double set of drum kits and a fury of guitars. Each of the four pieces on the album are long, making it nearly 80 minutes, so each track goes through numerous changes, keeping it dynamic. They really create an atmosphere of bombast as well as calm,

parts that are marked with little trinkets of sounds. Like one of their obvious influences, A Silver Mt. Zion, it seems the whole band take to singing, giving the vocals a choral quality as they sing "O'Shenandoah." This gives the album a soundtrack sensibility as if it backed a good movie—perhaps a meditative, Appalachian road film in grainy black and white. It's those more open-ended, chaos-friendly parts that keep any real connection to the strict, composed forms of classical music—not to mention their inclusion of contemporary instruments, buzzy guitars, and polyrhythmic drums. If you're up for experiments in rock, classical stylings, and acoustic noise, this is worth a shot. It also has some intriguing artwork and packaging to boot, making it stand out from all those other discs filed under "S." (BA)

Magic Bullet, magicbulletrecords.com

Stay Lows, the—The Red Budget, CDEP

It figures I'd find a record like this only after compiling all those obligatory year-ending top 10 lists. Where have these guys been hiding? This majestic seven-song EP is everything you could ask for from a young post-rock quintet and then some. The album-opening "We'll Give Them Their Shoes Back at the End," where the glassy notes of a slowly accelerating crescendo begin to swell together like tides, is as captivating as most of what Godspeed You! Black Emperor put to magnetic tape. The moody epic "Requiem for Ventura Boulevard," all emotive cello and roaring guitars, does Mogwai proud. But, this Buffalo group's also sharp enough to offset the sweeping and ambitious pieces with more accessible fare that's just as riveting and carefully sculpted. Case in point: the shoe-gazing pop-rock of "That's What You Get for Talking About Science," the stitched-together playfulness of "The Zombies Have Laptops," or the adrenaline-pumping refrains of "Shooting the Breeze With an Air Rifle." The closing "The Twin Peaks of Mt. Kilimanjaro" aims to tear down the roof and, at times, feels like it's close to succeeding. High praise, indeed, for a quietly released EP. Now, if only I could edit those top 10 lists. (JV)

Self-released, thestaylows@hotmail.com, thestaylows.com

Step2far/Spider Crew - Hooligans, CD

This excellent, straightforward split is a must for fans of NYHC. Vienna's Spider Crew is a supergroup made up of members from both Europe and the US, and plays brutal, in-your-face hardcore in the vein of Sheer Terror. Similarly, Step2far is a stalwart NY band that dates back to the early '90s, playing tight traditional NYHC. Ignoring all trends, these two fine hardcore bands play old-fashioned hardcore as if hardcore were brand new. It's nothing short of remarkable that a sound that only took hold regionally in the US managed to expand internationally, but this mix of European and East Coast bands playing NYHC proves that barebones tough NY hardcore retains a tight global grip. (AE)

Street Anthem, 1530 Locust St. PMB 218, Philadelphia, PA 19102, streetanthemrecords.com

Suffocation—S/T, CD

As metal becomes co-opted, softened, or generally forgotten by both the underground and the mainstream, it's refreshing to have Suffocation release a new album of face-vaporizing old-school death

metal. There is no nu-metal, melodic crooning, emo breakdowns, or filler on this album. Only the technical, catchy, and crushing metal that vindicates your feelings of hatred for humanity and strengthens the urge to kick in the windshields of parked cars. Suffocation has always stood out as strong and skillful songwriters: the song structures and riffs always remain interesting, and the songs even have hooks as far as death metal is concerned. Frank's vocals remain suitably low, pissed, and scary. Really, Suffocation follows the unwavering formula they pioneered (with mixed results in the past) and this album is on par with *Despise the Sun and Effigy of the Forgotten*. Suffocation has those precision blasts, ridiculous double bass, pummeling thrash, and sick breakdowns that may compel you to murder your loved ones (especially on "Bind Torture Kill"). The one weak spot is the artificial drum production that plagues most metal, with the double bass sounding like an amplified typewriter, obviously the fault of triggers. Overall, however, Suffocation is a true and punishing return to form. (SC)

Relapse, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby, PA 19082, relapse.com

Suspicious, the—S/T, CD

I was completely taken by the Suspicious' debut single a couple of years ago, which I called a "sloppy, low-fi power pop diamond in the rough" in *Punk Planet* #68. The debut album has many of the charms that made the single so great, but it's almost too much of the same. Both "Memory" and "We're All Wrong" from the 7" are here again, in new recordings that are nearly indistinguishable from the earlier versions. The eight new songs are similarly catchy pop songs, with classic hooks that evoke an earlier era—the vocal melody in the verses of "Much Too Late" is a dead ringer for an '80s pop song that I just can't place (much to my it's-on-the-tip-of-my-tongue aggravation). But while the low-fi recording and sloppy performance worked well on a two-song single, it comes off as a little too amateurish on the full length. I know that's the Rip Off Records aesthetic, and I certainly wouldn't want this to be too slick or over-produced. But the songs here are so good they deserve a better presentation. (JC)

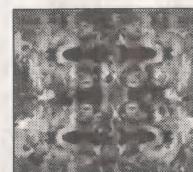
Rip Off, 581 Maple, San Bruno, CA 94066, rihoffrecords.com

Supersystem—A Million Microphones, CD

I have never really bought into the whole dance-rock thing. I mean, !!! is a good time, but if you ask me, Gang of Four got it right all the way back in 1979. Supersystem is a band that I've always been pretty neutral about, but this record is a step in the right direction. They stray from the stereotypical dance-rock bullshit that makes me want to puke, and instead embrace electronic music and world music. Sure, it gets old quickly, as most music in this genre does, but they manage to create some very interesting songs in their quest for danciness. Certain rhythms and guitar lines sound as though they come straight from Paul Simon's *Graceland*, especially "The Lake," my favorite track on the record. Oh yeah. I'm really into Paul Simon's *Graceland*. Which would explain why "The Lake" ended up as my favorite song. The African and Caribbean rhythms and melodies play into several songs, and it's what makes Supersystem stand out from the other dance-rock groups. It's peculiar

coping with life's trauma. In "Magic Trick," one of a number of songs featuring My Morning Jacket's Jim James, Ward and James sing of a woman who knows one trick: how to disappear. "It's like easy come, easy go," they sing. "Sometimes without goodbye, sometimes without hello / She's got one magic trick, just one, and that's it / She disappeared." *Post-War* identifies the problem and the solution. The album begins with both. "Poison Cup" accuses love of being poisonous. Ward sings that a spoonful or a sip of love will only "mess you up." The antidote is to "drink it up," to immerse oneself in it, to commit. In other words: life is full of pain and suffering, but it's not worth living unless people take action. "Chinese Translation" fades into "Eyes on the Prize," in which Ward sings, "With my eyes on the prize / and my mind on you / I put my pride on the line / my whole life, too." Life is risky, yet it demands action. Ward has not uncovered any new truths. Just ask Ferris. In fact, Ward's "Rollercoaster" is a cliche. Like the amusement park rides, life and relationships are full of highs and lows, peaks and valleys, ups and downs. They are frightening but fun. We've heard all this before, but we wouldn't have heard it before if it weren't worth repeating. And Ward repeats it with his sandpaper voice and waves of reverb. Along with his touring band, multiple drummers, Neko Case, and James, he crafts grand, rollicking arrangements that Ferris would think are worth stopping and hearing. (JM)

Merge, mergerecords.com



V/A—Let's Be Active: Keep the Fuzz off my Buzz, CD/DVD

This CD/DVD combo follows the Spring 2004 *Keep the Fuzz Off My Buzz* tour of the Midwest, which revolved around a performance art/comedy act/"organization" promoting interconnectedness and healthy living called *Let's be Active*. On the feature-length documentary, filmed by Dallas Richard Hallam, we learn that the LBA concept is a showcase for artist and performer Jarrett Mitchell to don a bootleg Sgt. Pepper's costume, do stand-up about paying taxes, and convince audience members to chug cans of corn. The whole LBA "experience" seems to bask in the glorification of irreverence: Jenny Hoyer (Paradise Island, Erase Errata) gets her jollies by wearing a wolf mask; tracks on the disc consist of someone repeating the mantra: "Free pizza, free pizza / If you ever meet me, give me free pizza"; vocals echo like the dentist's voice after you've had laughing gas. While the DVD reveals that sometimes audience members aren't in on the joke, everybody usually seems appeased by the creative hodgepodge of music—the best of which is featured on the accompanying CD. Paradise Island contributes some lo-fi, dicey electronic rockouts and off-key rants; Ft (the Shadow Government) unleash repetitive drone rock and shimmering grunge jams with muffled vocals; and *Let's be Active* provides a psychedelic aural collage mixing clips from a '60s Presbyterian youth convention, sitars, and chants of "Live til you die." The high point of this audio/video conceptual mash-up has to be the output of William Elliott Whitmore, whose majestic banjo and bass-voiced, bluesy spirituals bring soul to the mix. While the rest of the shebang is obscure and just a bit wacky, his tunes are uncomplicated and significant. This unique package allows the listener not only to listen, but also to watch the music and witness the makings of a good-spirited DIY tour. It's a buzz worth having. (KG)

Sick Room Records, Ltd., sickroomrecords.com/King Power Cinema



V/A—Slaying Since 1996, 2xCD

Label anthologies such as *Slaying Since 1996* have many purposes, but the two that hold the most water are fairly simple: Because labels are in the business of releasing slices of musical history, anthologies serve as primers to the moments and musicians they captured. And as most labels with anthologies started before the MP3 obliterated the way we consume music, oftentimes their early releases only exist as dusty stacks of wax on a shelf; the anthology brings those to listeners on both sides of the turntable. This Suicide Squeeze Records two-disc compilation covers nearly all of the wide range of artists with whom they've worked, including out-of-print tracks from the Black Heart Procession, Melvins, Of Montreal, and the Constantines, as well as unreleased tracks by Russian Circles, Crystal Skulls, Earlimart, and quite a few others. Surprisingly (or unsurprisingly, depending on your taste), the bigger names on the comp are the biggest letdowns: the Elliot Smith, Modest Mouse, Les Savy Fav, and the Unicorns tracks strike everyone except the biggest of fans as largely filler. And if judged by the songs included here, most of the lesser-known acts like the Scenic Vermont, Goon Moon, and Aspera will stay low profile. With a few notable exceptions (S, Pedro the Lion (whom I rarely enjoy, so this is doubly impressive) and the Iron and Wine/Six Parts Seven collaboration), the second disc, made up almost completely of unreleased tracks, easily trumps the first in quality. The Phil Spectorish pop of the Aislers Set demo for "What Fades First" is instrumentally spare but melodically looms large. Crystal Skulls' keyboard jangle on their demo version of "Baby Boy" makes great neighbors with the demented psych pop bounding from Of Montreal. Hella, Russian Circles, Metal Hearts, and Black Mountain all sound top shelf as well, making me wonder how many of these ended up either out of print or unreleased. *Slaying Since 1996* is an accurate portrait of Suicide Squeeze Records' past and present, which is a testament to their ability to sum up the labels' musical identity. Fans of the label will be pleased; the rest of us will pick and choose and be happy for it anyways. (SRM)

Suicide Squeeze, PO Box 8051, Seattle, WA 98108, suicidesqueeze.net

REVIEWER SPOTLIGHTS

lost, but full of strong convictions. Always an outsider, he turns to music to find that evasive feeling of belonging. The story starts out in a small Kansas town in the early 1980s where Smith is persecuted daily by the "rednecks" and "jocks" that populate his school. As you follow Frank and his band of misfit friends through the book, you can't help but develop a strong feeling of attachment to each character. Romalotti develops each character, important or not, in a very endearing way, giving the book a very personal touch. The book and the story are both very easy to relate to. Many of you will remember the scene described within the pages, and all who have experienced that feeling of being the outsider will instantly identify with Frank and his friends. Still, what makes *Salad Days* so great is that it is accessible for everyone to read. You don't have to recognize the band names, venues, or the countless references to the 80s hardcore scene to understand the message that the book tries to convey. That message being: find something you believe in and love enough to put all your passion into it.

More great books: Don De Grazia, *American Skin*; Don Bajema, *Reach*; Matt Ruff, *Fool On The Hill*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Rex Reason (KR)

John Coltrane, *Interstellar Space*. This album is uneasy listening defined—just John Coltrane and drummer Rashied Ali absolutely fucking wailing. True, *Interstellar Space* is relatively far from Coltrane's hardest stuff to listen to, but it's probably twice as far from his earlier, more traditional records. For me, this album is probably the best single summary of Coltrane's capabilities. It has melody to spare; it's just that the melodic parts often fly by so quickly as Coltrane wails forth his legendary "sheets of sound," that it seems a bit random and noisy at first. With nothing but drum accompaniment, the focus is squarely on John Coltrane and his saxophone. This is pretty far from a jazz or Coltrane primer, but if you want your head blown clean off without an electric guitar in earshot, *Interstellar Space* is the place. (That hurt as much to write as to read.)

Five things I got in the mail but couldn't listen to because I had to listen to my Punk Planet records, so I'll be listening to them soon: Electric Wizard, Dopethrone reissue; Can, Ege Bamyasi reissue; YOB, *Catharsis*; Cathedral, *The Ethereal Mirror*; Boris, *Acuma No Uta*



Reviewer Spotlight: Matthew Sibilo (MS)

Guided By Voices, *Bee Thousand*. These once begrunded but now defunct indie-rock stalwarts from Ohio, who stepped into the national spotlight during the mid '90s, often feel like a band that belong to a very specific place and time. When that time was actually happening, I was oblivious—still immersed with all things in or around the Pacific Northwest. Even if I had been exposed to them at the time, it's unlikely I would have been taken with the lo-fi wankery of an elementary school teacher as old as my father. Where does one begin? Help came in the way of a Matador-issued introductory compilation, but even that fails to capture the bands brilliance as does, say, 1994's *Bee Thousand*. This album, like other works by GBV's indie rock contemporaries (e.g. Sebadoh and Pavement), captures the immediate urgency of a genre classic. But unlike the dinosaur rock the band so unabashedly adored, *Bee Thousand*—whether by choice or sheer circumstance—encompasses the whole mentality the band helped pioneer, warts and all. Fact: "Hardcore UFO's" might be the best song about listening to rock music. "Hot Freaks" and "Kicker of Elves" never cease to put a smile on my face, knowing a 30-something Led Zeppelin fanatic, not a 16 year-old, recorded them in a basement. "Gold Star for Robot Boy" and "Buzzards and Dreadful Crows" are two of the catchiest songs aping the British invasion not featured on a *Nuggets* compilation. I think Mr. Pollard said it best on "Hot Freaks" when he states, "I met a non-dairy creamer explicitly laid out like a fruit cake."

My Psychology Today: Of Montreal, *Hissing Fauna, Are You the Destroyer?*; Lifetime, *S/T*; Girl Talk, *Night Ripper*; Singles Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, Peter, Bjorn, and John, *Writer's Block*.



Review Spotlight: Sarah Stone Wunder (SSW)

Ryan Adams, *Heartbreaker*. Sometimes when I listen to this album, I feel sort of bad for Ryan Adams. Not, because of the incredibly heart-broken tracks featured on the aptly named *Heartbreaker*. But rather, because when Adams recorded this disc in 2000, he had no idea that one year later, he would rise to immense popularity—not for his songwriting or talent or voice, but rather, because the title of his first big hit, "New York, New York" happened to coincide with a catastrophic event in the city in mid-September 2001. Sure, instant fame is great, but I can't help but think Adams must have felt a bit conflicted that "New York, New York"—a track that is such a huge departure from *Heartbreaker*—propelled him into the spotlight and onto adult rock radio sandwiched between songs by Sarah McLachlan and U2. *Heartbreaker* also is bittersweet for me because, unfortunately, I think this is where Adams peaked—with his first solo effort. Every album since has rung hollow. They miss this first album's soul, its simplicity, and its emotion. This is the disc I listen to when I'm feeling low, when I feel like singing, when I'm driving, when I'm just lounging around. I remember listening to this album while studying abroad in college when, every once in a while, I'd find myself missing the States. Songs like "Oh My Sweet Carolina," "Come Pick Me Up" and "In My Time of Need," would momentarily transport me back to America in a way "New York, New York" never could.

Making me feel 'merican: The Band, *The Last Waltz*; John Fogerty, *Blue Moon Swamp*; Frank Sinatra, *The Very Good Years*; Gillian Welch, *Revival*; Geto Boys, *Uncut Dope: Geto Boys' Best*

though . . . with as many interesting parts that they recorded on this album, they make an equal amount of extremely non-interesting parts. They're on the right track, but there's only so much that can be done with this genre. (MB)

Touch and Go, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, touchandgore-cards.com

Top Ten - Easily Unkind, 7"

A girl-fronted group made up of members of the Bobbyteens, Killer Legendary, Wynona Ryders, Soup, etc., Top Ten delivers retro rock at its finest. Reminiscent of late '70s and early '80s garage punk, the band sounds like what the Go-Go's could have been. There's a severe West Coast sound here, with a lot of harmonies. It's a pretty awesome 7" on the first couple of spins, but then just gets better. These folks are one of those bands that can seamlessly mix their originals with covers. On this one, you get DMZ's "The First Time's the Best Time" and Teenage Head's "Ain't Got No Sense." "Infectious" is the only way to describe this collection of songs. I really just want more in a bad way . . . I've been left jonesing here. (DM) Classic Bar Music, 1323 1/2 Mina St San Francisco, CA 94103

Trapdoor Fucking Exit—*Crooked Life/Straight World*, CD

No Idea has become one of those labels where it's a safe bet that if you like a couple of their releases, you'll likely find interest in a lot of the other ones on their label. You can almost blind-buy a record on the label and end up liking it. They've exposed me to some great bands over the years, and it doesn't look like their track record is going to be soiled anytime soon. Trapdoor Fucking Exit play some rough-edged punk rock with a thick, driving sound. The music is sort of off-kilter and they throw the occasional odd tempo change in there to keep it interesting. The raspy vocals are a perfect fit for the sound they are singing over, and while hard-edged, you can understand pretty clearly what the man is singing about. Much like the other bands on this label of which I've become a fan, I'm not only going to check out Trapdoor Fucking Exit live, but I'm also going to continue to follow them from this point forward. (MXV) No Idea, noldearecords.com

Tuxedomoon—*Bardo Hotel Soundtrack*, CD

This is a soundtrack less in the sense of Ennio Morricone, perhaps, than Rachel's "Systems/Layers" or Gastr del Sol's "Harp Factory on Lake Street," where bridges create phantom-images and the space between notes provides its own imagined narratives. You don't need to see "Bardo Hotel," the Tuxedomoon/George Kakanakis film these four musicians scored in 2005 and 2006 in San Francisco, to truly envision the film. And that's a testament to the effectiveness of this bizarrely enveloping 20-song offering. The music, for the most part, slinks along in the shadows: a bassy lurch and smoky jazz interlude here, a clip of narration and feedback or a repeating guitar figure there. The group occasionally unmasks larger intentions, offering grandiose centerpieces like the menacing strings of "Triptych," the drunken burlesque of the "Prometheus Bound" sequence or the breathtaking "Volcanic, Combustible." It's here that listeners might find themselves most disarmed, and rightfully so. (JV) Crammed Discs, 43 Rue General Patton, 1050 Brussels, Belgium, crammed.be

Urkraft—*The Inhuman Aberration*, CD

Urkraft's *The Inhuman Aberration* is actually a pretty fine album of Scandinavian death metal with great hooks and a production that pushes the guitar so upfront you'll be ducking under the swinging headstocks. It's a shame, then, that the vocals are so weak in comparison; the singer sounds like he's just recording guide vocals that got used in the final mix by mistake. Nevertheless, you could do a lot worse (say, 99% of US bands doing the Scandi thing) than *The Inhuman Balance*. (CL) Earache, earache.com

Uzeda—*Stella*, CDEP

The term "high fidelity" really seems to apply to recordings overseen by Steve Albini. Regardless of the size of the budget or how a band's sound lends itself to Albini's engineering dogma, albums committed to tape by him sound more true, urgent, and powerful than others. Somehow, the instruments of a standard guitar, bass, and drums rock group sound unlike any others. *Stella* is no exception. Albini makes the record sound fantastic, but Sicilian noise-rock quartet Uzeda makes it worth listening to again and again. "Time Below Zero" breaks down, lets Giovanna Cacciola's versatile voice emerge from the fog of the music and relentlessly builds drama like a season-finale cliffhanger. In "Camillo," drummer Davide Oliveri and guitarist Agostino Tilotta are able to extend themselves and freestyle a bit because Raffaele Gulisano's taut bass groove secures the song. Oliveri keeps time with rests as much as actual drumbeats. His cymbals splash and swoosh through the songs like Tilotta's dirty guitar. Tilotta scrapes his strings and frantically strums to fill the space with unsettling bolts of Big Black-style guitar skinning. Gulisano is the most valuable player, though. "This Heat" is a great track because Gulisano anchors the beat with uncomplicated bass chords that also efficiently propel the song. Because Uzeda does not play pop songs, all the instruments assume qualities of lead instruments at certain points. As a consequence, Cacciola's voice—in spite of the whispering, deep singing and wailing—is less of a lead instrument by comparison. Although each listen reveals more of the emotion and content of her vocals, Uzeda frequently overshadows the singer. The parity among the instruments benefits *Stella*, which, in the end, leads listeners to a louder, more intimate, less desolate *Spiderland*. (JM) Touch and Go, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, touchandgore-cards.com

Vague Angels—*Let's Duke It Out at Kilkenny*

Katz', CD

Chris Leo (the Lapse, Van Pelt) often sounds like a writer who also makes records. His latest project, *Vague Angels*, follows suit as we again hear him narrating lyrics, as opposed to singing them, this time over Celtic folk-infused melodies or pared down traveling guitar lines. The first *Vague Angels* LP accompanied Leo's wildly creative novel *White Pigeons* (which I enjoyed even though it made me blush start to finish). Clearly not interested in traditional formats for his fiction- or song-writing, Leo's style affords him freedom to take his music and his narrator anywhere. That's great and all, and his word-conscious lyrics are clearly clever, but

somehow his "songs" don't satisfy. Call me obvious, but "The Vague Angels of Vagary" begins with such a pretty tune that I can't help but wish he'd sing along to it, or hope that the discourse might crumble so we might glimpse a first-person narrator we can trust. But that's just one reporter's opinion. (KG)

Pretty Activity, 177 W. 26th St. #600, New York, NY 10001, prettyactivity.com

Verse - From Anger and Rage, CD

Holy shit, these vocals kill. I'm glad someone picked up the torch of early '90s Revelation bands and put it to good use. Think: Inside Out or Burn. Maybe even later 108. Instead of the dense, brooding intensity of *No Spiritual Surrender*, listeners are given exceptionally dynamic hardcore. Between speeding through soaring riffs and breaking it up with tasteful breakdowns, there's a subtle sense of atmospheric melody that's a step above the typically cut and dry. Despite the squeaky clean production, there's a level of frenzy to keep the song from failing flat. While the tone sacrifices a certain amount of heft expected in today's hardcore, it shows that Verse are looking to do a lot more than keep it dumb and heavy. It's not going to stop the kids from going apeshit at their live shows—that's what the singalongs are for. (VC)

Rivalry, PO Box 5242, Concord, CA 94524, rivalryrecords.com

Victoria Lucas, the—Hit the Ground Running

Fast, CD

Named after Sylvia Plath's penname, the Victoria Lucas is a six-piece group from Brooklyn. *Hit the Ground Run-*

ning Fast is an eight-song album that finds the group (whose members also participate in multiple other somewhat well-known bands) dipping in multiple spheres of influence with a wide, sloppy brush of DIY attitude. The rambunctious approach to indie rock seems to be Kinks-inspired, the repetitious and singularly minded guitar work idolizes Lou Reed, and I'll be damned if they don't fit a bit of the Pixies in every track. Combined with their disheveled-at-best attention to detail, the album comes off like something of a rough draft—not bad, per se, but needing serious revision before it's heard outside the band. All of the vocalists care little about staying on pitch. Their drummer's inconsistent timing bucks the band back and forth through the BPMs. To top it off, most of the tracks grab on to one idea or motif and ride it into the ground rather than developing on it. As a result, *Hit the Ground Running Fast* is something of an awkward, uncomfortable listen, because it's not out-and-out dismissible, it just reeks of underachievement and possibility. (SRM)

No No No, 95 Seigel Street 5B, Brooklyn, NY, 11206-3211, myspace.com/thevictorialucas

Walker, Jeff and Die Flutters—Welcome to Carcass Country, CD

I'd already decided that I was going to hate this record before I even heard it, and after giving it a couple of spins I haven't heard anything to persuade me otherwise. Still, I find it hard to be negative about an album conceived as a joke. After all, both Electro Hippies and Carcass were both very much tongue-in-cheek, so

why should we expect anything different from Jeff's latest project? What's to be learned from *Welcome to Carcass Country* then (besides the fact that they should have tried a little harder on the album title)? Well, Jeff butchers a bunch of country and folk standards with the assistance of some folks too drunk (from the sound of things) to know better. That said, like Alex Chilton's *Like Flies on Sherbert*, removing the stick up your ass reveals the album to be a fun rave-up if you don't take it all too seriously, and when Jeff salutes his fallen comrade in metal, Chuck Schuldiner of Death, with his cracked falsetto on "Rocky Mountain High," it's almost touching. Almost. (CL)

Fractured Transmitter Recording Company, fracturedtransmitter.com

Walls of Jericho—With Devils Amongst Us All, CD

Having never heard *Walls of Jericho* before, I was hoping for a Helloween tribute of sorts—unfortunately, it wasn't to be. Midwest metalcore is what *Walls of Jericho* deliver, and they do a pretty good job, with a few caveats. On *With Devils Amongst Us All*, the band stick close to the mid-'90s metalcore blueprint, roughly translated: the guitarists sound like they listen to way too much Slayer, instead of way too much At the Gates. This, of course, can only be a good thing. The band is tight, the recording crisp, the guitars sound great, and although the backing vocals sound like they came out of a can, I can live with that. Unfortunately, the songwriting is also lacking. Songs

start fast, drop into a mid-tempo mosh, then the emo-singy part into the breakdown and full speed ahead to the end . . . then repeat until you have an album's worth of tracks. I'm so close to really liking this album, but just a little more spit and polish would have done wonders. (CL)

Trustkill, trustkill.com

Waylons, the—S/T, CD

The Waylons don't like to be labeled "country." I reckon that's because they do something vaguely like country the way it's done best (and not often enough): with focus on an Average Joe/Jolene narrative that's backed by a charmer of a melody. Contemporary country tends to ooze emotional sap, play up the redneck caricature, and forgo genuine stories of and for real people. The Waylons sound friendly and honest as they play Americana pop tunes with cut-as-buttons harmonies and sing lines like "heaven is you in sunglasses" ("Say it with Me"). Most songs average around the delightful two-minute mark, and the album's 14 tracks vary from sunshine pop ("Anyone") to the lonely ballad ("Take Me Out") to songs sung wistfully to a "you," performed as endearingly as the Go-Betweens or Teenage Fanclub would. Male and female vocals mingle and two guitars talk like buddies in a style that seems so simple it must have been done before, but doubtfully with a DIY aesthetic or such remarkable sincerity. (KG)

Self-released, waylons.com

RERUNS: REISSUES FROM PUNK'S PAST

Alvarius B - S/T, CD

Initially recorded in 1994, this reissue features Alvarius B's lo-fi guitar instrumentals. (Alvarius B being Alan Bishop of the Sun City Girls, by the way.) Here, each track is short, nearly a minute or so apiece, but they very quickly form a mood. This is ready-made for road trips in the desert or for solo outings to smoke on a cold front porch. It's definitely for those moments of peace—those times for reflection. That doesn't mean the album's all on the slow side, as some pieces blister through the speakers in alien tones. The acoustic guitar transforms throughout the album, sounding like a basement John Fahey. It can also sound like a punk take on classical guitar, with warped tunings taking on pieces close to bluegrass or even oriental styles. Some of the tracks, in their brevity, seem unfinished or suddenly terminated, but that's part of its charm. (BA)

Abduction, PO Box 9611, Seattle WA 98109, suncitygirls.com

Animal Collective—Hollinndagain, CD

Hollinndagain was originally released in 2001, in a limited edition set of 300 hand-painted LPs. Then, the Collective was Avey Tare, Panda Bear, and Geologist, playing their first US tour in support of Black Dice. At that point, its audiences were by-and-large personal friends, so Animal Collective challenged itself to play new jams at each show. Hollinndagain documents the experiment. As you might guess, the album is loose, non-linear, occasionally random ("Four is gos-pel / four is gos-pel"), and takes, very seriously, the challenges of creating sound and establishing craft. Listening requires an attention span, but it's also richly rewarding—because it shows the Collective's becoming, sure, but most immediately because these songs are pretty great. When I heard the "hey hey" trill on "Pride and Fight," I nearly stood and twirled around the room. (MC)

Paw Tracks, paw-tracks.com

Ass Ponys—The Okra Years, CD

With heartfelt Americana tunes and Midwestern rock, the Ass Ponys did alt-country a decade before the genre had been defined. In a two-disc reissue, *The Okra Years* features select tracks from 1990's *Mr. Superlove* and 1994's *Grim*. Overall, the compilation's easy-going and country-tinged sound prove that these ponys were ahead of their time. (SSW)

Shake It, 4156 Hamilton Ave, Cincinnati, OH, 45223, shakeitrecords.com

Gainer—You Say It Like It's a Bad Thing, CD

Gainer play melodic punk with a tendency to dip into both indie and emo, resulting in a very sincere brand of music. The catchy melodies envelop the slightly bitter lyrics and deliver the songs in an endearing way. I haven't been able to get "No Help Needed" out of my head for days. Props to Ass-Card for bringing this record back. If you missed this album the first time around, don't make the same mistake twice. (BN)

Ass-Card, asscardrecords.com

Maher Shalal Hash Baz—Faux Départ, CD

I'm a sucker for the song that tries super hard, then fails so badly it gets good again. I love the sprawled and mismatched, the yowl and everyone's playing in a different time, which only makes you love it more, just like the ugliest puppy in the "Free Puppies" box. Japanese band Maher Shalal Hash Baz is definitely the ugliest puppy in several universes, as most of its shambling-scrap pop songs are under a minute long, bassoons duel with drums, and toys bleat. In other words, it's hardly Top 40 material—but it was never supposed to be. Recorded at Olympia's famed Dub Narcotic by Noise Conference pioneer Arrington de Dionysio, *Faux Départ* was originally intended as a limited-edition souvenir of the band's 2003 west coast tour. Luckily, Yik Yak is re-releasing the pretty ugliness, so you can hear the hawks, hoots, and claps for your own self. Here, the Japanese legends are joined by the Oly royalty, including members of Deerhoof, Old Time Relijun, and Le Ton Mité, and the new whole is cuter than 20 of the ugliest puppies. Perhaps the poem quoted in the liner notes makes a better metaphor: "a song that begins with a mistake / like two birds calling to each other / a mistake that is destined like a score." (MC)

Yik Yak, PO Box 460511, San Francisco, CA 94146, yikyak.net

Persuaders—Forced To Fuck-The Anthology, CD

Poorly played, poorly recorded Stooges/Dead Boys style punk. Interesting for a few cuts. But this reissue has 34 songs—the bands' entire catalog. Certainly is snotty. (AJ)

Shattered Records, [www.shatteredrecords.net](http://shatteredrecords.net) | Ass-Card, asscardrecords.com

Spoon—Telephono/Soft Effects, 2xCD

Austin's beloved gets the re-issue treatment of its earlier Matador material. While one can't help but feel it's a ploy to tide over the newbies with a "new" morsel as the band records its album, *Soft Effects* and *Telephono* stand the test of time, proving that Britt Daniels is one of the most formidable songwriters of his day. (MS)

Merge, PO Box 1235 Chapel Hill, NC 27514, mergerecords.com

Stitches, the—8 X 12", CD

When it first came out in 1995, I remember copies of this album by Southern California '77 revivalist punk gods the Stitches flying off record store shelves. It's been repressed a ton of times since then, and now it's finally available from a relatively big label on CD via TKO imprint Vinyl Dog. Even if you own one of its many vinyl incarnations (including a recent picture disc reissue), it's encouraging to see this classic of straightforward '77 brilliance escape the underground and find its way to a larger audience. Albums are rarely as well received as *8 X 12"* was upon its initial release, and today's generation of punk music lovers will likely eat it up as well. (AE)

Vinyl Dog, 8941 Atlanta Ave #505, Huntington Beach, CA 92646, vinyldogrecords.com

REVIEWER SPOTLIGHTS



Reviewer Spotlight: Justin Vellucci (JV)

Calexico, Spoke. Knowing that this Tucson ensemble's loyal following tends to break into fits of breathless poetry about desert horizons or sand-choked nights could lead the uninitiated to believe Joey Burns and John Convertino stepped fully formed out of some Arizona mirage one summer afternoon. *Spoke*, released before the incredible *The Black Light*, proves that assumption incorrect, offering a richer, more nuanced storyline. Recorded when Burns and Convertino's collaboration was a Giant Sand side project in the truest sense of the word, this 19-song disc finds the group's core members offering raw, understated songs as they work to find a sound distinct from Howe Gelb. They do not wander long. All the later templates are here: the acoustic border ballad ("Point Vicente," "Sanchez"), the open-road driving song ("Glimpse"), the European polka-hall exercise ("Mazura"). We also get some of the group's most heart-wrenching work (the spare "Stinging Nettle," the cello-assisted "Removed"), as well as odd outtakes like the Friends of Dean Martinez-tinged surf romp "Scout." The record can feel casual and slightly off-hand (only four songs break three minutes; three don't reach 60 seconds), but it's also amazingly complete. At roughly 44 minutes, *Spoke* doesn't waste a moment, and few tracks—even interludes—could have been cut from the mix. It's a record that demonstrates why Calexico deserves the audience it amassed through later successes, and one that still resonates, even as Burns and Convertino continue to evolve.

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be: Music from the Motion Picture *The Map of Sex and Love*; Richard Buckner, Since; Sean, *The Pace is Glacial*; June of 44, *Engine Takes to the Water*; Low, *Things We Lost in the Fire*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Mike Vinikour (MXV)

Social Distortion, Mommy's Little Monster. When I was a freshman in high school, I had little money and even less access to finding punk records, but I wanted to hear everything I could. My friend, Mick Calhoun, had a lot of records back then and was a year older than me and made me a compilation tape of some great punk rock. Some of it I requested and some he just put on there, like when he added a couple songs by Social Distortion. At the time, it was some of the best punk rock my young ears had heard, and I immediately sought out their one and only album, *Mommy's Little Monster*. It wasn't easy to find even back then, but eventually I found a copy and fell in love with it. I listened to it every day walking to work at K-Mart in the cold and memorized it from start to finish. It remains to this day one of my three favorite punk rock albums of all time, and it is a rare example of a perfect album (even though the version of "Telling Them" on this record pales in comparison to the version on *Hell Comes to Your House*). Now, 20 years later, this album still gets regular play at Combustion Manor!

While I'm hibernating this winter, I'm playing: Skinny Puppy, *Mythmaker*; Battle of Mice, *Day of Nights*; V/A, *American Hardcore* soundtrack; Mouth of the Architect, *The Ties That Bind*; the Matchheads, *Cadillac 7*.



Reviewer Spotlight: Kira Wilsniewski (KW)

Built to Spill, The Normal Years. First and foremost, let me just say this album is fantastic. It compiles songs recorded from the band's first couple incarnations and throws them all together in a not-so-cohesive product. There isn't one overall "sound" for the album, and that's part of its charm. The classic song "Car," with its melodic, dreamy sound and lyrics about getting high and going for a nice drive theorizing about life, is a stark contrast from the poppy, borderline punkish song "Joyride," with its fast, three-chord formula. In the adorable and upbeat song, "Girl," front man Doug Martsch sings "Suddenly my girl comes / and she's not even dumb / in fact she's kinda smart / will she break my heart / and wad it up and throw it in my face?" The instrumental track "Some" is a nice addition to this eclectic mix of songs. Not to say that other releases from Built to Spill are not good, but *The Normal Years* simply possesses a certain degree of raw authenticity and a wide array of sounds that makes it distinctly different. Sure, the recording quality isn't the best, but that makes it all the better. It certainly doesn't stop the fact that 10 years since *The Normal Years*' release, when you go see Built to Spill, you try to send telepathic thoughts to Martsch to start playing "Car." Let's be honest, who doesn't want to see movies of their dreams?

My Current Heavy Rotation: Crime in Stereo, *The Troubled Stateside*; Brand New, *The Devil and God Are Raging Inside Me*; Terror, *Always the Hard Way*; Deerhoof, *Friend Opportunity*; William Elliott Whitmore, *Song of the Blackbird* (reviewed this issue).

Weary Boys, the—Jumpin' Jolie, CD

Weary Boys, the—Jumpin' Jolie. Somebody call the Photoshop police—the Workingman's Dead-referencing cover to the Weary Boys' *Jumpin' Jolie* commits any number of atrocities, least of all the disturbingly oversaturated blue eyes of the girl on the cover (Jolie herself?). Similarly, their music is better in concept than execution and could use a bit more polish. When the Weary Boys throw down old-time foot-stompin' twang, they come off as a pretty decent good-time folk band, but their up-tempo numbers tread dangerously close to Blues Traveler territory. These guys are definitely laying on the old-time nostalgia act thick, but regardless of issues of authenticity, that approach generally works better for them—the instances in which they come across more like a jangly early '80s college rock with a bluegrass fetish come and go without notice. (PMD)

Weary, wearyboys.com

similar vein, the trio pummels through an eardrum splintering mix of bass-and-drum-heavy Chicago post-hardcore, '70s full stack Southern sludge, and angular DC dissonance. With guitarist Evan Patterson holding down vocal duties, the band loses the cornball hardcore growl that hindered them during their run with Breather, but the David Yow stylings makes the long-standing Jesus Lizard comparison even more unavoidable. While Young Widows' influential sources are far from inconspicuous, they do what they do exceptionally well. Inciting a manic headbangers' ball at all times, both their relentless intensity and precision make for a crushing listening experience. The recording techniques of Chris Owens (Lords) often give off the impression that your listening to the band play in a bomber hanger and help to magnify an already monstrous sound. (BM)

Jade Tree, 2310 Kennwyn Rd. Wilmington, DE 19810, jadetree.com

V/A—Anti-Disco League Vol.1: True to the Cause, CD

I have often mentioned the fact that I believe that the art behind putting together a compilation record has been all but lost recently, what with the influx of cheap label samplers and comps made up entirely of well-known tracks. *True to the Cause*, the first of hopefully many in the Anti-Disco League series, breaks out of this pile of underachievers with a terrific assortment of pure blue-collar street oi. The comp mixes well-known acts such as the Templars and Retaliator with bands you'll want to know all about, such as Bulldog Samurai, Haircut, and the amazing Des Kontrol. The theme of this disc is anti-political, and the songs reflect that at every turn. A great addition to any serious collection and easily the best comp of the past five years. (BN)

Merge, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, mergerecords.com

Whitmore, William Elliott—Song of the Blackbird, CD

William Elliott Whitmore's third effort, *Songs of a Blackbird*, is his best work to date. The album tells a story centered on the life, death, and rebirth of the farmland. His songs have more layers and texture through the addition of more instruments, not to mention his voice, which sounds like an old southern preacher—rich and rusty. Those familiar with Whitmore's work know about his ability to sing in simple terms about the hardships of life. On *Song of the Blackbird*, he tells the tale of life on the farmland through drought, rain, and flooding. The opening track, "Dry," is about a harsh drought brought to the farmland. The instrumental track "And Then the Rains Came," gives an auditory image of a much needed, beautiful rain falling. "Lee County Flood" rounds out the story with Whitmore's signature banjo strumming along at an upbeat tempo. His previous albums have mainly been himself and a banjo, which provided a raw, barebones feel that did not lack sincerity. On *Song of the Blackbird*, he invites the talents of John Crawford on drums and Dave Zollo on piano and organ. This addition of these two talented musicians lends this album a richer, fuller tone than *Hymns for the Homeless and Ashes to Dust*. (KW)

Southern, PO Box 577737, Chicago, IL 60657, southern.com

V/A—England's Dreaming, CD

Quoth Jon Savage: "Punk had many hits. Only few of them are played over and over again, and like anything you get too much of at the wrong time or in the wrong place, it makes you feel slightly dizzy." With 25 songs and well over an hour of music, it doesn't get much better than this. Everything here has been hand-plucked from the thousands by Jon Savage, the encyclopedic author of the classic tome *England's Dreaming*, which covers the punk scene in England starting in 1976 and going through the demise of the Sex Pistols in 1979, all from personal knowledge and experience. Needless to say, if anyone has the chops to pull off such a comp, it would be Savage. The selections here cover everything from the usual staples—the Ramones, Devo, the Buzzcocks—to lesser-acknowledged bands such as the Urinals, Bizarros, and the Avengers. The Sex Pistols and the Clash are graciously glossed over—bands that, while important, have become oversaturated in a genre where the lesser-known acts are the ones that really shine. As such, *England's Dreaming* is an introduction to those who don't know, and a comprehensive accessory to those that do. Normally this gem would only be available overseas, but the purveyors of good taste over at Light in the Attic are distributing it stateside. Snag a copy and get informed. (SBM)

Trikont, Kisterstraße, Post 901055, D 81510, München, Germany, trikont.com | Light in the Attic, lightintheattic.net

V/A—John Peel and Sheila: the Pig's Big 78s, CD
 John Peel had an immeasurable effect on music; the man had impeccable taste. With his passing we definitely lost one of the greats. Before his death, Peel summoned Trikont to release a full CD of tracks from his favorite 78s. His selections are all over the map, ranging from "brass bands, dance music and yodeling, to early rock 'n' roll and traditional music from China and Africa, and from comic football sketches to bizarre noise imitations." It's a truly amazing package to behold. The case folds out to three panels. Each panel contains quotes about Peel from various celebrities like Paul McCartney, Elvis Costello, and Elton John, among others. The side panels house two separate booklets, one in English, the other German. Inside the booklets is the account of how this compilation came about, a short interview with Peel's wife, Sheila, and the reason behind each track's selection. Musically, this isn't for everyone. It's an eclectic mix suited for people interested in early 20th Century folk music. My personal favorites are the tracks by Lightnin' Hopkins, Peanuts Wilson, Jack White (no that Jack White) & his Band, Earl Bostic, and Sonny Terry. Even from the afterlife, John Peel continues to be an influential force. (DA)

Trikont, Kistlerstrasse 1, Postfach 901055, D 81510 Munchen, trikont.com

V/A—The Ugly Truth About Blackpool Volume Two, CD
 On the surface, this looked like something I wouldn't dig. Looking at the label's name, I figured this would be 26 remakes of the sounds Crass and Sham 69 perfected almost 30 years ago. On the contrary, this is a pretty diverse and compelling compilation. There's plenty of punk-rock 'n' roll: Sick56 have a Motörhead-meets-Bad Religion vibe, while Kraul has a Social Distortion-meets-Leatherface feel. But that's not all: Limousine contributes a tuneful foot-tapper and Walter and the Knobheads harkens back to the macabre pop of the Damned. The Neon Trees' "Here to Stay" is a folky pop tune with a touch of country. When People Become Numbers are in that Dillinger Escape Plan mold that has played itself out. None of these bands are gonna make *NME* go bonkers, but these songs make for a satisfying comp that isn't held under the water of only one genre. (EG)

Just Say No to Government Music, PO Box 1025, Blackpool, England FY3 0EB, jsntgm.com

V/A—Tribute a Bob Marley, CD

Seven Argentine and Puerto Rican reggae acts reverently perform 15 lesser-known Bob Marley hits. Tracks range from smooth reggae jams to ska with barbershop harmonies (with barbers who overzealously roll their r's). The worst attempts on the disc come from one Mimi Maura, whose take on "Judge Not" is like ska gone to Sunday school, while "Concrete Jungle" finds her exaggerating her pseudo-Jamaican dialect (and she wonders "where is DA love to be found?"). The breakout stars of this Latino Bob Marley tribute album have to be Sessions, who carve out an innovative groove with the horns, hand drums, and dub effects they add to "Sun is Shining." And yes, they do make me want to move my dancing feet. By the time the tribute closes with "Is This Love," Marley's diehard Latin American lovers have sufficiently answered his question. (KG)

Delanuca, delanuca.com

REVIEWS APPEARING ONLINE AT PUNKPLANET.COM/REVIEWS

46 Short—Truth Denied, CD
A Death in the Family—This Microscopic War, CD
Across Tundras—Dark Songs of the Prairie, CD
Affair, the—Andy, CD
All City Affairs—Bees, CD
Alleged Bricks—Place Your Blame, CD
Ammi—Imitation, CD
Amoeba Men, the—Let the Infection Set In, CD
Anavan—S/T, CD
Another Breath—Mill City, CD
Antique Curtains—The Renaissance, CDEP
Art of Flying—As if you Were the Sea, CD
Aspen It Is—Release Me! From the Weights of Gravity, CD
Assassination—Snipercurst, 7"
Avatars, the—Never a Good Time, CD
Awesome Snakes—Venom, CD
Baby Calendar—Gingerbread Dog, CD
Balboa/Nitro Mega Prayer—Split, CD
Battleship—S/T, CD
Bellmer Dolls—The Big Cats Will Throw Themselves Over, CD
Below the Sound—Three, CD
Better to See You With, the—S/T, CD
Bettie Serveert—Bare Stripped Naked, CD
Black Angels, the—Passover, CD
Black Neon, the—Arts & Crafts, CD
Blackmore's Night—The Village Lanterne, CD
Blank Its—Happy Accidents, CD
Blow Tops—Insected Mind, CD
Blue Velvet—Four Songs, CDEP
Brokedowns, the—These Colors Don't Run, CD
Brother Elixir—What is What, CD
Burial Year—Pestilence, CD
Cameran Campaign 1984, the—Blood for Nashville, CD
Cameran—A Caesarean, CD
Campaign 1984, the—Blood for Nashville, CD
Capital—Signal Corps, CD
Casualties, the—Under Attack, CD
Choi, Jason—Leave the Night Behind, CD
Choose Your Poison—Thrashed to Ribbons, 7"
Circles—When the Big River Floods, CDEP
Copyrights, the—Mutiny Pop, CD
Corvette, Miki and the Stingrays—Back to Detroit, CD
Crash Kelly—Electric Satisfaction, CD
CX Kidtronik—Krak Attack, CD
Daggers, the—Tear It to Pieces, CD
Dance—A-Tron—S/T, CD
Day of the Dead—A New Healing Process, CDEP
Days Off—Jamming in the Scene, CDEP
Deadsoil—Sacrifice, CD
Dirty Faces—Get Right With God, CD
Donbrath—Zinga, Chrystal—The Park Sessions, CDEP
Drugs of Faith—S/T, CD
Echo Helstrom—The Veil, CD
Editors—Rarities, CD
El Boxeo—Awake & Dreaming, CD
Ellison—Say Goodnight, Sleep Alone, CD
Ensemble—S/T, CD
Envy—Insomniac Doze, CD
Everything Falls Apart—Escape, 7"
Experimental Dental School—20 Creatures, CD
Fabulous Rudies, the—S/T, CD
Fairmont—The Subtle Art of Making Enemies, CD
Fall of Serenity—Bloodied Salvation, CD
Few and the Proud, the—Stampede, CD
Fischoff, Dave—The Crawl, CD

Fish Karma—The Theory of Intelligent Design, CD
Foma—Phobos, CD
Foot Foot—Ye Old Pitchshift, CD
For Those Lost—This is our Fight, CD
F-Units—Reject on Impact, CD
Gadget—The Funeral March, CD
Get Killed—No Substitutes, 7"
Ghidrah—S/T, 7"
Gist—Diesel City, CD
Goldstars, the—Purple Girlfriend, CD
Good Good, the—Furrows, CD
Graves At Sea/Asunder—Split, CDEP
Grizzley Ends, the—Attack, CDEP
Glajiro—S/T, CDEP
Hairshirt—Lover Politician, CDEP
Hammer Bros.—The Vitality, CD
Hesher, the—Distance Equals Depth, CD
Hill the Switch—Domestic Tranquility and Social Justice, CD
Holly and Plastic—Life After the Lie, CD
Home—Sextene, CD
Homemade Knives—No One Doubts the Darkness, CD
Hot Rails—Debut, 7"
Hunchback—Ugly on the Outside, CD
Huskies—The Good Fight, CDEP
Iron Hero—Safe as Houses, CD
Jesse Jaymz Acoustic Onslaught—One Man Crew, 7"
Jet Lag Gemini—Business, CD
Kastner, John—Have You Seen Lucky?, CD
Know the Score—All Time Low, CD
Life Crisis—Churchstate, 7"
Limbus—Promo MMVI, CD
Little Killers, the—A Real Good One, CD
Los Kahunas/The Invisible Surfers—Split, CD
Lousy Break—No Reason, 7"
Mainline—Notice of Disconnection, CD
Makeoutmusic—Get off my Soapbox, CD
Manta Ray—Torres de Electricidad, CD
Mass Movement of the Moth—Finale, CD
Matches, the—Decomposer, CD
Matias—Summer, CDEP
Meeting Places, the—Numbered Days, CD
Merge Left—Divided Nation, CD
Michel, Paul—Revolve, CD
Mitchell, Jeff—Batteries and Blankets, CD
Monstrous—Mother Nature's Slaves, CD
Mors Ontologica—Dead and/or Famous, CD
Muse Giganticus—The Invisible Hand, CD
Motion Commotion—S/T, CDEP
Mstrkrft—The Looks, CD
My Hero Died Today—From Our Cold Dead Hands, CD
Naysayer, the—Smoke Reality, CD
Neckties Make Me Nervous—S/T, CD
Nervous Exits—Get Out, CD
Never Enders, the—Air Raid Romance, CD
Nine Days to No One—Ark, CDEP
No Trigger—Canyoneer, CD
October Allied—Point me South, CD
Orkestri, Paulan & Laakko Lampait—Sylissan Oot, CD
Panic—Strength in Solitude, CD
Peelers, the—Let's Detonate, CD
Plagiarists, the—Veto!, CD
Pilot to Blow up the Eiffel Tower, the—INRI, CDEP
Parch Nob—Can of Worms, CD
Portico—Shape to Form, CD
Portugal, the Man—Devil Say I, I Say Air, CDEP

Purified in Blood—Reaper of Souls, CD
Purrbot—Civil Unrest, CD
Rainer Maria—Catastrophe Keeps us Together, CD
Red Animal War—Seven Year War, CD
Reel Big Fish—Our Live Album is Better Than Your Live Album, CD/DVD
Regret—Misery Brigade, CD
Revolution Mother—Enjoy the Ride, CDEP
River City Tanlines—I'm Your Negative, CD
Royden—Best Friends our Worst Enemies, CDEP
Rum Diaries, the—We're Afraid of Heights Tonight, CD
Secret Society, the—Sad Boys Dance When No One's Watching, CD
Sharp Ease, the—Remain Instant, CDEP
She's Dead/Cadaver Dogs—Split, 7"
Silence is Treason—S/T, CD
Sinking Ships—Disconnecting, CD
Skullflower—Tribulation, CD
Smith, Ches—Congs for Brums, CD
Sote—Dastgaah, CD
(sound of) Kaleidoscopes, the—From Where You Were to How You Got There, CD
Stapler, the—Metaphysical Haircut, CD
Static Waves, the—Blast, CD
Stationary Odyssey—This is as Good as it Gets, CDEP
Street Dogs—Fading American Dream, CD
Struggle in the Hive—S/T, CD
Sugarplum Fairies—Country International Records, CD
Super Black Market—Will Sell Anything, CD
Sweatheart—So Cherri, CD
Sybarite—Cut Out Shape, CD
Takota—The Ivory Tower, CD
Tanks, the—Summon Creature, CD
Team Stray—Popular Mechanics, CD
That's Him, That's the Guy—Help Me I'm on Fire, CDEP
Theater Fire, the—Everybody Has a Dark Side, CD
Thievery Corporation—Versions, CD
This Will Destroy You—Young Mountain, CD
Toothfairy—Does Not Work Well With Reality, CD
Track a Tiger—Woke up Early the Day I Died, CD
Tshilds, Amalea—Painted Tiles, CD
Turn Blue—Fire Like TV, CD
Vacancies, the—A Beat Missing or a Silence Added, CD
Vaginasore Jr.—S/T, CD
Valentines, the—S/T, CD
Varsity Drag—For Crying out Loud, CD
Vibrolas—from Parts Unknown, CD
Voetsek—A Match Made in Hell (Selected Works 2003–2006), CD
Von Schirach, Otto—Maxipad Detention, CD
Voodoo Blue—Smile 'n' Nod, CD
We be the Echo—Stanislaw Stories, CD
Williams, Andre With the Diplomats of Solid Sound—Aphrodisiac, CD
Wilson Gill & the Wimpy Sinners—American Banned, CD
Wobblies, the—Red Dawn Rising, CD
Your Black Star—Sound From the Ground, CD
V/A—Cheap Ass Music Volume 1, CD
V/A—Dorm Sessions Volume 3, CD
V/A—Everybody Loves ANTiSEEN: a Loving Tribute to the Boys from Brutalsville, 2xCD
V/A—Triumphant Rhythm, CD
V/A—Songwriting is not a Crime, CD—R

COMICS



A Late Freeze

This self-published comic is so rich in detail, color, and narrative it almost deserves to be considered a graphic novel (or graphic novella). Yale-trained artist Danica Novgorodoff ably demonstrates that even a nearly wordless surrealistic narrative need not be tedious or off-putting. The story depicts the unlikely romance between a bear and a robot, their offspring (a cub/robot hybrid), and their separation from one another by a world that just can't understand their love. Novgorodoff possesses an amazing eye for detail—similar to that of Chris Ware—as all of even the most marginal detritus of the modern world finds its way into her panels. For instance, a shoot-out in a motel room shows a Gideon Bible and a "Thank You for Not Smoking" tent card flying through the air in the midst of the melee. Meanwhile, the exterior of a Cracker Barrel General Store is adorned with those vintage soda pop signs (the artist sneaks in one for "Ex Lax"), and even the porch has all those rocking chairs for sale. *A Late Freeze* is worth seeking out, as Novgorodoff is well on her way to becoming eminent in the comics world. If this review alone doesn't compel you to give her all of your money, then you should at least take the time to check out her website, as her portfolio shows that she's excelled at every medium she's tackled thus far (drawing, painting, photography, and comics). (AC)

\$6.50, Danica Novgorodoff, www.danicanovgorodoff.com

12 Reasons Why I Love Her

12 Reasons puts a contemporary spin on the old-timey genre of romance comics, adding to the mix a sassy commitment-phobic girl, an out-of-sequence narrative, and an unplanned pregnancy with an ex. What's not been updated is the bland, idealized quality of its characters. Artist Joelle Jones seems preoccupied with capturing her protagonist's cuteness from as many angles as possible, while writer Jamie S. Rich can't get enough of their flirty banter. But when they have their first "real" fight, it's still hard to feel invested enough in these characters to care. This book serves fine as a guilty pleasure, but many readers will crave more substance. (CD)

\$14.95, Jamie S. Rich and Joelle Jones, Oni Press, www.onipress.com, ISBN: 978-1932664-51-5

Are We Feeling Safer Yet? A (Th)ink Anthology

Are We Feeling Safer Yet?, the second anthology of Keith Knight's weekly single-panel cartoons, draws on an increasingly ridiculous political and social landscape. Knight misses no opportunity to point out the insanity of American life as mired in a hopeless war in Iraq and racial disharmony at home. His cartoons are clever and thought-provoking, although some are so tied to a blip in popular culture that they are already dated. Mostly, however, Knight comes across as one of the few brave writers out there willing to stand up and point at an emperor wearing no clothes. (LG)

\$12.95, Keith Knight, Keith Knight Press, www.kchronicles.com

Aya

Set in Africa's Ivory Coast in the far more stable days of 1978, Aya focuses on the exploits of three teenage girls. The setup's familiar: one girl (our Aya) hopes to go to college someday; one seeks the attentions of wealthy pushover men; and one seems to just be discovering herself as a desirable woman. That the story deals in character types so familiar to Western popular culture offers some perspective on the ways family and community life in this part of the world are quite similar to that of Anytown, USA (though certainly in other ways unique). But for all the 'hey-she's-just-like-me' levity, it's difficult to look at the workaday ease of these characters' lives or the air of enthusiasm for the country's relative economic prosperity, without seeing the out-of-frame threat of the following decade's dramatic recession or the more recent rigged elections, military coups, assassination attempts, etc. Still, none of these events figure directly into the frame of this story and, to me, it's this zoomed-in scope that makes for such a good read. Aya isn't at pains to illustrate a geography lesson, but nevertheless, the book presents a portrait of life in a time and a place. It's a portrait that's very different than anything we've seen on the news in a good long time, and whatever you make of that, I think it's worthwhile. (CB)

\$19.95, Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, Drawn & Quarterly, www.drawnandquarterly.com, ISBN: 1-894937-90-2

Beasts!

Beasts!: A Pictorial Schedule of Traditional Hidden Creatures (From the Interest of 90 Modern Artisans) is every bit the stunning, epic art book its highfalutin title suggests it to be. Filled with bold renderings of curious beasts culled from myth or folklore, this 200-page coffee-table tome doesn't take its imaginative theme lightly but, rather, provides a thorough (albeit often humorous) showcase of these imaginary beings. To create Beasts!, a plethora of up-and-coming artists were assigned a mythical creature—be it a Unicorn, Centaur, or Dog-Faced Bunyip—to interpret however she/he chose. The rewards of exploring Beasts! are many: not only do you get to learn how a Cliff Ogre obtains his dinner, but you're also exposed to exclusive works from some of today's most talented artists. (LP)

\$28.95, Fantagraphics Books, www.fantagraphics.com, ISBN: 978-156097-768-1

Carnet Sauvage

Not a comic in the traditional sense, Carnet Sauvage is illustrator Aneurin Wright's self-published travel journal from a recent trip across Europe. Instead of well-paced panels you'll find detailed sketches of places and people paired with jotted notes and lots of Xeroxed ticket stubs. This is a little much to read front to back, but it makes for good browsing in short chunks. Carnet Sauvage contains sidebars and sections exploring everything from Greek statuary to mini cars to bike-riding Dutch mamas. Wright's witty diagrammatic drawings detail the attributes and accessories of locals and fellow travelers alike, given further context by his renderings of meals, customs, and streetscapes. (CD)

\$4, Aneurin Wright, Welsh El Dorado Press, welshel dorado.com

Curses

When I think of quality indie comics, Curses is the kind of book I have in mind. Covering a fairly broad range of story styles, this mild-tempered collection is anchored by central character Glenn Ganges, a figure familiar and nondescript enough to easily relate to, but so endlessly curious about his life and environment that he's well worth following for 100 pages or so. What do I mean by "curious"? Well, Ganges takes after his creator, Kevin Huizenga, in that he's a consummate researcher. He doesn't merely tell a story—he summarizes its history, details its breeding cycles, and annotates scholarly debates on its more subjective points. And this is what makes Glenn's story about the mob of starlings in his front yard just as engrossing as the story about his ghost tormentor, and just as entertaining as the tale of his quest to pluck a feather from an ogre. Most impressively, he

does this without ever coming off as musty or academic. In fact, he manages to come across as a nice guy telling you about something that happened to him the other day. But mark my words, Glenn's stories will stick with you, and you'll soon find yourself telling a friend something you just learned about the European starling. (CB)

\$19.95, Kevin Huizenga, Drawn & Quarterly, www.drawnandquarterly.com, ISBN: 1-894937-86-4

Estrus #4

The bulk of this comic recounts a handful of author Mari Naomi's romantic mishaps, beginning in kindergarten. Some focus on small amusing moments; others give clipped overviews of an entire relationship. They're all pretty funny and easy to relate to. As for the art—at its best it is quite terrific, hinting at primitive and Etruscan influences (think Modigliani or, closer, David B.), but at its not-so-best, it can slip into inconsistent, less careful panels. Also included is a slice of comic journalism recounting a notorious incident of a dog mauling and killing a San Francisco woman, which is well-researched and rather fascinating if you aren't already familiar with the story. (CB)

\$5, Mari Naomi, P.O. Box 640811, San Francisco, CA 94164-0811, marinaomi.com

Evenfall Volume II: Soul to Keep

Picking up midway through the *Evenfall* series, this 104-page comic follows a grieving Phoebe Shankar as she falls into a world populated by monsters and her own personal Yoda in the form of a giant, flightless, talking bird. Phoebe embarks on her inner quest while getting dragged on a murder mission in what is a strangely absorbing comic with some of the most clichéd dialogue I've ever read. I think the author downloaded a generic pep-talk generator to spit out gems like "We have to kill the serpent king." Like many female characters drawn by men, both women in this book are scantly clad and improbably well-endowed. Other than that, this is an entertaining read. (LG)

\$9.95, Pete Stathis, Blue Feather Press, www.petestathis.com

King-Cat Comics #67

To tell a comics artist that he/she is skilled at capturing places, moments, or epiphanies in a concise yet compelling way is not the most original compliment. After all, isn't this sort of the point of comics in the first place? And yet few illustration styles are as spare as that of John Porcellino, who, via his long-running, self-published *King-Cat Comics*, has compellingly captured a lot. In issue #67, Porcellino reflects on leaving San Francisco for Denver, sleeping in the car, nighttime fears, and a curious character named Square-Head John. Alternating between short panels, narrative observations, and lists, Porcellino has

About our reviews: We review independently produced comics. It's true. We do it for the love of reading them and for the love of writing about them. We don't care whether or not you buy them based on our reviews, but we will make every effort to give you what information we can about the comics we review that are available for sale. We review comics that are put out by the small publishing houses, comics that are put out by small art collectives, and comics that are put out by individuals. We'll try to review every comic we get in-house, but sometimes that's just not possible. Sorry.

This issue's reviewers are: Chris Burkhalter (CB), Ari Charney (AC), Christa Donner (CD), and Lisa Groshong (LG) Edited by Laura Pearson (LP)

crafted yet another King-Cat installment that is honest, accessible, and worth checking out. (LP)
\$3, John Porcellino, PO Box 18888, Denver, CO 80218, www.king-cat.net

The Leading Man #3

The *Leading Man* is a slick global espionage book wherein Hollywood stars secretly work to thwart Code Black, a "terror for profit organization" that excels in training "perfect human killing machines." Ideal for those who pine for the naive days when we associated insurgent aggression with night vision goggles, silencers, bluetooth headsets, and knife specialists—as opposed to the clumsy actuality of land mines and shoe bombs. Best accompanied by your Viper Pit action figure set. And if anyone knows whom terror cells use for hair stylists, give a shout. (CB)

\$3.50, B. Clay Moore and Jeremy Haun, Oni Press, oni.press.com

Lucky

The substance of this Drawn & Quarterly collection of Bell's self-published work is how she overcomes self-doubt and circumstance to produce her art. She's also one of the few cartoonists (along with David Chelsea) to truly show all the compromises (and horrors) of New York apartment living. Bell ends up moving into a loft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where the tenants seem to communicate solely through mean-spirited notes to one another. In between finding a suitable space to inhabit, she somehow manages to maintain subsistence by cobbling together odd jobs such as tutoring two sex-obsessed French adolescents in cartooning or serving as a nude model for figure drawing classes. Bell's comics are thought- and dialogue-intensive, so her characters are simply rendered in order to avoid being completely crowded out of each panel by the speech bubbles. But as her character is the sort of twentysomething who's at a philosophical crossroads in life she needs all that space to think out loud. (AC)

\$16.95, Gabrielle Bell, Drawn & Quarterly, www.drawnandquarterly.com, ISBN: 1-897299-01-X

Moomin, Book One: The Complete Tove Jansson Comic Strip

With their round, hippo-like bodies and innocent eyes, Moomins initially strike you as simple, lovable creatures. And in many ways, they are. But when Finnish children's book author/illustrator Tove Jansson introduced these whimsical characters in the 1940s, she also imbued them with more complex, human qualities: e.g. naivete, spontaneity, and a love for life's aesthetic pleasures—be it flower meadows, fine diamonds, or champagne strewn with rose leaves. The Moomins confront real-world issues such as dealing with unwanted guests, navigating the dating scene, and figuring out how to pay for vacation.

Usually they wind up getting into all kinds of trouble and then just narrowly escaping. Drawn & Quarterly is responsible for reprinting this classic, thoroughly entertaining comic strip for a North American audience (the first time it has ever been published on this continent). *Moomin, Book One*, together with four more volumes forthcoming on D & Q, will comprise the entire strip drawn by Jansson before her brother Lars took over in 1960. *Book One* is the perfect entry point into the endearing adventures of Moomin, Moominmamma, Moominpappa, Snork Maiden, Sniff, Snufkin, and Myrtle, plus all their "poor relations." And just like an overeager extended family member, you too might find yourself coming back frequently to visit these loveable Moomins. (LP)

\$14.95, Tove Jansson, Drawn & Quarterly, www.drawnandquarterly.com, ISBN: 1-894937-805

My Brain Hurts #5

Liz Baillie continues to prove that a comic series with great artwork, believable characters, and a compelling narrative can be done without the support of a publisher. The series centers on Kate, a punked-out adolescent, who's learning to deal with the unforgiving social atmosphere of high school not only as a punk, but also as a newly out lesbian. Despite her intimidating appearance, Kate is actually far less assertive about her identity than her seemingly awkward and bookish girlfriend, Desi. It may seem like an unlikely match at first, but Baillie has created a fully realized world with enough detail to make it convincing. Baillie is also an effective visual storyteller. Not only is she great at depicting expressions and body language, but she also sets up each scene with a variety of different angles and close-ups, allowing for a cinematic effect. The series is scheduled to run for ten issues, at which point I hope that one of the major indie publishers might see fit to reprint them all in one volume for wider distribution. (AC)

\$3, Liz Baillie, www.lizbaillie.com

Northwest Passage #3

Scott Chantler comes through with the long-awaited final chapter of the *Northwest Passage* trilogy, bringing the story to a satisfying end and with the promise of future installments. Like the series' previous two books, this one combines historical fact with human-level drama, expressive drawings, and fast-paced action. The cover blurb promises "bare-knuckled frontier combat," but for me, the story's value goes far deeper—to the pathos of loyalty and loss. (LG)

\$8.95, Scott Chantler, Oni Press, www.onipress.com

The Mother's Mouth

This odd but fascinating book combines traditional comics narrative with colored sand paintings, photog-

raphy, childlike crayon drawings, and natural history diagrams. Each of these elements builds to create a complex mythology around the story's main character, Virginia, a pudgy and insecure librarian whose mother is dying and whose current boyfriend becomes a stand-in for her long lost childhood love. Shaw's surreal storytelling blurs any distinction between memory, reality, and dream states, as the past and the present unfold to yield an unexpected climax. (CD)

\$12.95, Dash Shaw, Alternative Comics, www.indyworld.com, ISBN: 978-1-891867-98-9

Ptizeria Kamikaze

This unusual graphic novel is actually an adaptation of a novella by the Israeli writer Etgar Keret. The story involves a twentysomething Israeli man who killed himself only to find that the personal torment of his mortal life pales in comparison to the dull stretch of eternity he now faces in a purgatory especially reserved for suicides. The inhabitants of this purgatory walk around marked by their chosen means of death: a bullet through the head remains an open and unsightly wound for one, while other more fortunate souls—"Julietts" in their parlance—remain in pristine condition owing to their pill-assisted demise. Cartoonist Asaf Hanuka has created a grey-scaled world where many of the characters stare out vacantly from heavily ringed eyes. The main character soon learns that his girlfriend chased his suicide with her own and sets out to find her. Along the way, he encounters an idyllic commune where miracles occur so long as they are not significant and a messianic cult that remains unsatisfied even in the afterlife. (AC)

\$14.95, Etgar Keret and Asaf Hanuka, Alternative Comics, www.indyworld.com, ISBN: 1-891867-90-3

Skyscrapers of the Midwest #3

I was pretty excited about this book based on some sample pages I'd seen online. I like that Joshua Cotter's stocky cat-eared characters look like soft Lego figures, I was never let down by any of his densely textured panels, and I can't get enough of this giant

robotic hobo that wanders through the pages. But the social-outcast-has-crush-on-pretty-girl story failed to match the pencils in quality, and the yearbook satire at the beginning of the issue didn't really go anywhere, even striking me as kind of mean-spirited. Give me more robo hobo, though, and I'll take another look. (CB)

\$5, Joshua W. Cotter, AdHouse Books, 1224 Greycourt Ave, Richmond, VA 23227-4042, www.adhousebooks.com

Sounds of Your Name

Sounds of Your Name collects Nate Powell's past self-published and small-press works into one thick volume. There's been no weeding out of weaker pieces,

which occasionally makes for an uneven read, but this is definitely a collection worth spending some time with. Powell is a master of atmospheric black/white linework, through which he manages to channel all the heartfelt angst and gritty magic of growing up a punk rock misfit in a small town. Frustratingly, many of the book's lush drawings are degraded into jaggy lines by poor digital scans. Microcosm has just released a new pressing, which I hope has resolved this issue. (CD)

\$18, Nate Powell, Microcosm Publishing, www.microcosmpublishing.com, ISBN: 0-977557-9-5

Trains Are Mint #1

A walking tour of Manchester's train stations makes for one of the best comics I've read in awhile. As our narrator ambles from station to station, we take in illustrations of what he sees and read about what things he finds interesting along the way. Though his observations are unremarkable, they make for very good reading, especially when he's writing about the stations themselves. Early in the book he muses, "I've never seen much point in Deansgate Station. You can see it from Oxford Road Station . . . but I love it for its pointlessness." The comic's real victory, however, is its incredible watercolor illustrations of Manchester's streets, alleys, tower blocks, abandoned lots and, of course, train stations. Largely depicting unpeopled urban landscapes, it strikes me as something of a muted love letter to the public spaces that are as much home to many of us as the houses or apartments where we sleep, watch TV, and store books we've read. I'm reminded of both Chantal Akerman's film *News From Home* and the Jam's song "That's Entertainment." And lemme just say, if you're evoking those things, you're well on your way to this reviewer's affections. *Trains Are Mint* is a bit pricey, what with exchange rate and all, but for full-color small press of this quality, I'd say it's worth every penny. Er, pence. (CB)

4.99 pounds, Oliver East, olivereast@hotmail.com. www.rollingstockpress.co.uk

Violet Miranda: Girl Pirate #3

Violet Miranda: Girl Pirate elbows its way into a modern landscape swarming with pirates. This slim third volume of a four-part series follows best friends Violet Miranda and Elsa Bonnet as they're separated by a pirate captain who has kidnapped them. Violet is taken aboard the pirate ship to find treasure hidden by her father. Not surprisingly, both women make quick work of turning the situation around. I appreciate the girl-power theme here, and the angular and vivid drawings that manage to evoke a lot of feeling in a few lines. But arr, I'm getting sick of pirates! (LG)

\$4, Emily Pohl-Weary and Willow Dawson, www.kissmachine.org

BOOKS



Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy

Stephen Duncombe

You don't have to own a PS3 or subscribe to *Us Weekly* or be wholly absorbed into Reality TV Land to recognize that ours is a culture obsessed with fantasy, enamored of celebrity, and in constant pursuit of entertainment. But progressive politicians, argues author, activist, and media analyst Stephen Duncombe, would be well served to acknowledge this a bit more. And well, not just acknowledge it, but use it—to start employing imagination and spectacle, to speak directly to people's emotions and desires, in order to communicate progressive aims. If politicians use methods that appeal to people's dreams, the argument goes, they will be more apt to tune in.

In his book *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, Duncombe doesn't lay out a series of policies or procedures on how to actualize this "politics of dreaming" (although I find it entertaining to imagine elaborately designed "progressive" amusement parks and activist-themed video games and radical snack foods for consumers to indulge in "liberally"). Rather, he presents an "alternative political aesthetic"—a dreampolitik that draws inspiration from commercial culture, popular fantasies, and the spectacular, but puts an "ethical" spin on them. He calls these "ethical spectacles," created in the image of cultural landmarks like Las Vegas, ads for McDonald's, and video games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, but also set apart from these things—more transparent, participatory, and real.

If these ideas sound a bit convoluted, that's because they are. In fact, the very task of digesting Duncombe's intricate theory of re-imagining progressive politics in our "phantasmagoric" times requires a great deal of imagination. After all, it's not immediately apparent what an "ethical spectacle" or "a politics past reason" (not the most palatable of phrases) might look like in action. *Dream* provides plenty of examples of organizations and movements that embody some form of dreampolitik: Bust magazine, MoveOn.org, Reclaim the Streets, Critical Mass, etc. But these examples aren't equally illuminating: while some of these groups are amazingly productive and innovative, others seem to put so much emphasis on the spectacular and the fantastical, that outsiders (not to mention participants) might be hard-pressed to derive any real meaning.

Duncombe, like any great debater, is skilled at anticipating such arguments. Throughout his defense of dreaming, he readily acknowledges what the more skeptical reader might be thinking, what urgent questions he or she might be scrawling in the margins. Indeed, in one of the book's final chapters, he admits that his description of this "dream politics" might seem "fuzzy" or "feverish," but this, he explains, is only because it has more in common with poetry and the avant garde than political party platforms and Enlightenment-era rationality. Or, to put it another way, if it seems counterintuitive to draw profound political meaning from the appeal of *Grand Theft Auto* or the noisy spectacle of Vegas, perhaps, rather than coming up with rebuttals in the margins, we simply need to dream a little more.

I can't argue with the fact that we need better ways of communicating our political beliefs and universal human desires with genuineness, across party lines, and Duncombe is correct in his main assertion that it's going to take imagination... a lot of it. As he states in the introduction, "To embrace dreams as part of a winning strategy for progressive politics may be just a dream itself, but really, at this point, what do we have to lose?" OK then, how about those radical snack foods?! —Laura Pearson

The New Press

O Street

Corrina Wycoff

Corrina Wycoff's *O Street* is the impressive second title from OV books, the nascent offshoot of the Chicago-based non-profit, *Other Voices Magazine*. For 23 years, *Other Voices* has published a wide range of underground fiction, from emerging experimental writers to established authors. If there's any thread running through this spectrum of storytelling, it's a commitment to the short story, as told from the perspective of the little guy (or girl). The editors envision a parallel mission for OV Books: "to keep the short story form vital in today's competitive and increasingly-commercial marketplace." *O Street* is exactly the type of book that will sustain OV in its charge. Wycoff's first collection is a fierce, unflinching account of a girl raised in poverty by a schizophrenic mother. Brought up amid drugs and sexual abuse, Beth Dinard's painful childhood emerges in a series of disjointed stories. The book's structure makes full use of the short story's unique ability to condense and erase time, as Wycoff knits together past and present, creating a literary effect that mirrors the repetitive, seemingly unbreakable cycle of poverty and mental illness. These fragmented stories refuse to fill in the blanks, leaving incongruities and unanswered questions that sink with the weight of their silence. Beth—who alternates between Liz, Lizzie, and "the O Street Girl," according to her various incarnations—is a complex character, someone who garners equal amounts of sympathy and frustration from the reader. Her unbreakable attachment to an abusive mother forces a heartrending investigation of the nature of love—is it devotion, caretaking, or the self-effacing need for an other? In simple prose and matter-of-fact dialogue, Corrina Wycoff manages to craft a powerful collection of short stories, a feat of skill any emerging (or established) writer would envy. —Sarah Coffey

OV Books

communications Act of 1996, which put an end to most FCC safeguards against media consolidation. As he sketches out the story of an FCC where cronyism rules and "golden parachute" jobs are offered to exiting officials by the entertainment and communications industries, Chester makes a compelling case that the conglomerates have also been laying down the necessary groundwork to launch a divisive takeover of the Internet in the coming years, with sobering implications for the future of free and equal expression online. While Chester effectively examines historical precedents and the current telecommunications climate that seriously threatens net neutrality, *Digital Destiny* never really transcends its role as rallying polemics for those already engaged in media advocacy. *Digital Destiny* does offer a broad overview of the past decade of media policy and its implications for unhindered expression on the Internet, but the tone is most likely too dense to offer an entry point into the dialogue for neophytes and uncritical media consumers. For those who scrupulously follow issues of media consolidation and the looming threats to the free flow of information on the Internet, there is a depth and exhaustiveness to Chester's research that is impressive and instructive. But for a work that argues so strongly for the need to actively engage the general public in these issues, *Digital Destiny* falls short of being the *Common Sense* of new media advocacy that it aims to be. —Paul M. Davis

The New Press

The Show I'll Never Forget: 50 Writers Relive Their Most Memorable Concert-Going Experience

Edited by Sean Manning

If an A-list of musicians wrote essays about their most memorable concert-going experience, it wouldn't be half as compelling as this collection of essays, *The Show I'll Never Forget*. Imagine Bono waxing reverent about The Clash or Beyoncé reminiscing about some Toni Braxton concert back in 1994. There would be something unsatisfying about the absence of vicariousness. An A-list of authors, however, are once starstruck, always starstruck, Take Max Allan Collins (author of the graphic novel *Road to Perdition*) who sits in the second balcony of House of Blues, his view obstructed while waiting for Kevin Spacey to sing Bobby Darin tunes. Or Daniel Handler (*Lemony Snicket*) and Andrew Sean Greer (*The Confessions of Max Tivoli*) going ga-ga over Emily Haines and Metric. Or Sean Manning receiving VIP tickets to an REM concert at Madison Square Garden from a certain diminutive bald man he meets in an elevator. The rewards of success for writers never amount to an endless supply of libidinous fans or free illicit sub-

DVDs

Edited by Paul Davis

Edited by Javier Ramirez

stances ("After all those years of freelance writing... finally a perk!" Collins writes after Spacey moves his family up to the front section). Writers from Rick Moody to Lydia Millet relive their most memorable concerts just as you or I would, only with a better vocabulary. The essays in *The Show I'll Never Forget* could not be more eclectic in style and topic. Some veer into musicology, like Robert Polito's essay on the Pogues. Others are appealingly loopy, like Heidi Julavits on the Rush concert she can hardly remember. The essays that stay closest to the concert experience are the most successful, followed by the writers lucky enough to share a personal experience with his/her musician of choice. *The Show I'll Never Forget* takes the reader on a journey through 50 years of punk, blues, jazz, R&B, and rock, from Clarence Carter to the Mekons and not an essay misses a beat.

—Leland Cheuk

Da Capo Press

Mamarama: A Memoir of Sex, Kids, and Rock

■ Roll

Evelyn McDonnell

When you have a baby, some things about the old you just don't survive the trip to your new life. Evelyn McDonnell's *Mamarama: A memoir of sex, kids and rock & roll* looked like a book that would try to chart her struggles with this very dilemma. What I found was actually two books. One is a great memoir about growing up, motherhood, change and balancing past and present. It is funny, heartfelt and touching. The other book, unfortunately, is a long love letter to a former self, a self-conscious, name-dropping history lesson of the times that used to be. As a piece of journalism, *Mamarama* chronicles some important periods in pop culture, and gives us a boots-on-the-ground look at those eras with real grace. But, there's something missing from the scenes of the writer's life before motherhood. Once she gives up the name-checking and starts writing from the heart about her subjective experience, the book soars. When McDonnell describes her first marriage and the hash it made of her life, she begins to give the reader a reason to care about where her story is headed. By the time she is a wife for the second time, a stepmother and a working mom with a young baby, we have a feeling for what makes her particular life hers. In the end, she's given us a messy, unpredictable narrative and thrown journalistic and critical distance out the window. That's the book I wanted to read. I just wish I hadn't had to wade through almost 100 pages of back story before it began. —Eireann Caffall

Da Capo Press



Burn to Shine 3: Portland, OR

Directed by Christoph Green

The thematically strong concept of rounding up a number of bands from a specific region and having them perform in a condemned house that is soon to be demolished underlies the third installment in the *Burn to Shine* series. The brainchild of Fugazi's Brendan Canty and Christoph Green, the shtick is great in concept but in practice turns out to provide little more than a convenient reason to goad a city's best and brightest into performing in uniquely picturesque surroundings for one day without having to worry about noise complaints or broken windows. There's nothing wrong with having a strong concept to make the staid live-performance film compelling again, but the third installment doesn't reach the heights of form or function displayed in the previous two.

After chronicling the final hours of houses in Chicago and Washington DC, Canty and Green tapped Chris Funk of the Decemberists to assemble a lineup of bands to represent Portland. Not surprisingly, Funk's lineup leans heavily on Portland indie twee-pop royalty, and isn't quite as representative a cross-section of the local rock scene as found in the Chicago and DC installments.

While the film displays the extent of Funk's address book, the performances are hit and miss. Sets by Quasi, The Planet The, and the Shins are notable only for how perfunctory and lackadaisical they seem, and though Portland hip-hop group the Lifesavers turn in an admirable performance, their appearance here as the first hip-hop act on a *Burn to Shine* comes across more as tokenism than a true effort at exploring musical diversity.

Despite these issues, there are some excellent performances featured here. Sleater-Kinney turns out a somber and refined version of "Modern Girl" that reveals a ruminative side the band rarely explored while together, and the Thermals turn out the sort of straight-ahead stunner agit-pop that they've made their own with the previously unreleased "Welcome to the Planet." A soul-demolishing moment is delivered by the Gossip, which musters the sort of passion and power with only bass, drums, and Beth Ditto's voice that the Decemberists' orchestral pop aspires, and fails, to reach. Also of note is a charming appearance by the Ready, a synthesizer-heavy pop band made up of 10-year-old Rock and Roll Camp for Girls graduates who sound a hell of a lot better than some of the other contributors that are three times their age.

Burn to Shine 3 is bookended by footage of the house's neighborhood and its demolition by controlled burn. There is a certain lyricism to the shots of Portland and the incendiary sendoff of the house burning to the ground, the portentous narration and Canty's instrumental interludes grasp for a gravitas that the project doesn't merit. And despite a handful of truly excellent performances, you're left with the sense that you just spent an hour watching people enjoy a great party you weren't invited to. —Paul M Davis

Trixie, www.trixiedvd.com

Don't Need You: The History of Riot Grrrl

Directed by Kerri Koch

What's missing from the video history of Riot Grrrl, *Don't Need You*, is not as important as what is there: what's there is Kathleen Hanna, Allison Wolfe, Corin Tucker, Madigan Shive, Natalie Cox, Mark Andersen, Ramdas Biksem, and Ian MacKaye onscreen, smartly recollecting the origins and impact of Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s. Zines, flyers, album art, concert footage, protest shows, and straight-up interviews are all edited together, interspersed with the angry manifest demands of the movement, to portray a passionate, enduring moment in our recent past.

What's missing, however, still needs to be explored. The role of gender in feminism is raised, pointedly, by MacKaye, and never thereafter addressed. Race—a great failing of both Riot Grrrl and its 1970s-era feminist antecedent—is mentioned only briefly by Biksem. Perhaps most significantly, the non-music-playing audience—supposedly the primary aim of the movement, the attendees of the shows—has almost no role in the film. The movement is treated as a closed system, like an extremely influential secret musical project, only heard by other

bands. Yet we know that the role of cultural products are to impact culture in general, and we know that Riot Grrrl did much more than help the Spice Girls define their market.

But what did Riot Grrrl do, for those of us who attended shows and didn't go on to join Le Tigre or Sleater-Kinney? Did it change the experiences of the girls at shows, standing against the wall holding their boyfriend's jackets, referred to memorably in the film as "coatracks"? How much money did it raise for the organizations it intended to support? What greater awareness of sexual assault, gender inequality, and the relevance of feminism to culture did Riot Grrrl really provide? The answers are worth seeking out, but such deeper queries are not addressed here. —Anne Elizabeth Moore

Urban Cowgirl Productions, [www.urbanCowGirlproductions.com](http://www.urbanCowgirlproductions.com)

No Idea Records' The Fest 3

This DVD documents the third incarnation of the Fest, brainchild of No Idea's Tony Weinbender, which brings dozens of bands to the swamp in Gainesville. The Fest is basically three days of intoxication and listening to music nonstop with a couple hundred of your closest friends that have all become family. This isn't the type of festival with fancy badges and

industry folk—it's more about just getting out there and having fun.

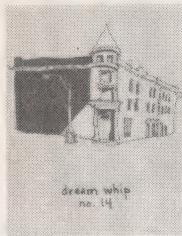
Three different film crews documented the madness which creates several different looks for the DVD. The footage at the venue Common Grounds has a variety of clear shots compared to the footage at the Atlantic where some of it looked like it was taken with a little digital camera on video mode—all grainy and pixelated. The overall sound quality is surprisingly good.

The Fest fuses a couple different genres with performances by the Mercury Program, Mates of State, and the late Engine Down sandwiched with Fifth Hour Hero, Asshole Parade, and Against Me! Fest 3 happened over Halloween weekend 2004 and Hot Water Music was the only band documented to have every member dressed up in a cohesive theme—religious figures: the Pope, a priest, a monk, and a rabbi.

The DVD has no interviews or thrills or chills, but simply captures the performances. An added bonus is the animated graphics between each band created by Steak Illustration, artist for the Fest and many No Idea bands. —Kira Wisniewski

No Idea Records, P.O. Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

ZINES



Dream Whip #14

A small institution of its own kind, *Dream Whip* has been kicking out the travel jams for 14 issues now, and this one comes in the form of a perfect-bound little rectangle. In 300-plus pages, Bill Brown details his experiences traveling through American motels, co-ops, and the like, all translated through his own handwriting, occasional drawings of isolated buildings, and short, scribbled cartoons. There are no linear chapters here, nor does anything develop in sequential movement; rather, this book-length zine becomes a collection of vignettes brought on by an insatiable need to gather experiences. Even with all of these quirky events and interactions, however, *Dream Whip* contains a perpetual sense of nonfulfillment. Unlike most zines involving travel, the stories here are not riddled with personal and emotional content. They involve Brown, naturally, but they aren't all about him alone. Rather, the stories in *Dream Whip* take a route that is simple and factual, relaying detail without being overly precious about it. Reading this zine at length can become laborious at times, due to his handwriting being stuck in caps lock, but that is really the only complaint to be had here. This is obviously a labor of love, and as Brown guides you through every tiny town in America and across the Atlantic—buying coffee and driving at whim—it is hard not to become wistful for a similar life. (SBM)

\$6, PO Box 53832, Lubbock, TX 79453, dreamwhip@gmail.com

Blam! Blam!: An Erotic Bedside Journal #2

The second issue of *Blam! Blam!* is an homage to 70s glam-rock, featuring erotic writing and photography centered around androgyny, doing it with rock stars, group sex, and the not-to-be-forgotten glitter and dancing that surrounds Bowie-era rock 'n' roll sex fantasies. The writing is raunchier than the photos, which mainly aim to tease and seduce rather than expose. However, among the beautifully laid-out (color and glossy) photos are peek-a-boo type images of the "real" deal. Put together with the mindset of catering to women's ideas of what is sexy, *Blam! Blam!* shows its readers fantasies that co-exist with reality—anyone can be sexy or play out their secret desires. As well, *Blam! Blam!* gives equal treatment to men and women, and it doesn't buy into the notion that every non-mainstream man or woman should be getting off to *Suicide Girls*. It's much more intelligent than that. (AJA)

\$10, PO Box 272, Milwaukee, WI 53201, www.blam-blam.com

Cash Cow #2

Not unlike *Bitch*, this zine takes a feminist approach to pop culture, but with perzine tendencies. In this "body"-themed issue, *Cash Cow* creator Heather MacLean inserts plenty of personal info. into her brainy analyses. For example, she expresses her own opin-

ions regarding hair removal in an article investigating women's body hair, and she "weighs in" on her personal weight issues in an article about fatphobia. These articles are well researched and well-written, to be sure, but it's her thoughtful personality shining through that gives this zine an enjoyable sense of quirkiness and humanity. Here's someone who has given critical thought to her research, making *Cash Cow* well worth the read. And bonus: she's super funny too! (LM)

Clench, #1-8

Clench is a one-sheet zine, each issue of which is devoted to a specific band. Multiple issues feature Void and the FU's, while issues #3 and #6 spotlight Agnostic Front and Dez Cadena, respectively. Mostly, zinester Philip relates bits and pieces of the bands' histories and gives his opinion of/experiences with the music. It's typical fanzine stuff, and only for the fanatics. (AJA)

Free, Philip Knowles, 240 Spring Hill Dr., #210, Roselle, IL 60172-2470

Common Coast

This thin booklet is not a zine in the traditional sense, but rather a pamphlet regarding the state of the wetlands in Louisiana and what the reader can

do to help this cause. Reeling in the recent Katrina disaster to exemplify a need for change, *Common Coast*'s goal is to convince citizens to petition their congressperson to support Coast 2050, a canal plan with a \$14 billion price tag that would help increase the amount of wetlands along the coast of Louisiana. As is the nature of political pamphlets, only one side of the story is really being told here, and while there is a bevy of information included, rarely is there factual evidence to back up the claims (which seems counterintuitive for something so environmentally specific). Preserving the wetlands is a dire and necessary cause, to be sure, but *Common Coast* loses clout by using such sweeping numbers and grandiose conclusions without qualifying them. (SBM)

Free, www.coast2050.gov, commoncoast2050@gmail.com

Cough #4

Cough is a bland art and music zine, about which I felt challenged to find anything interesting. One piece that maybe comes close, however, is the "Sunday Adventure Club" imploring one to celebrate life in a live, juicy *Eat Mangoes Naked* skippity-doo-dah kind of a way that seems oddly out of place in a zine that also suggests making a tattoo gun from little more than a pencil eraser, a toothbrush, and the B string from your guitar. (LM)

\$1.50, Tina, PO Box 604, Moss Beach, CA 94038, coughzine@yahoo.com, www.coughzine.tk

The Daily The #25 - #26

I like the fact that the writers of *The Daily The* are sisters who resurrected the zine after 11 years of dormancy, having started it as teenagers. That being said, it is decidedly unpunk as far as zines go, with subject matter such as sports, Huey Lewis, teen mag-ish style advice ("My recommendation for the ultimate girl-getaway: a cruise"), country music, and ... you get the picture. It reads like a family holiday letter describing recent vacations or celebrations, compounded by references you only get if you know the editors: e.g., "Some of you may remember how nice the upstairs bathroom used to be, before Kellyn got a hold of it." Who is Kellyn? And I should care because ...? (LM)

\$1 each, thedailythe@gmail.com

Edgy Zine #17

There's something about *Edgy*. Where most personal zines bore their readers with stories of mundane jobs, drunken nights, and eccentric (but not that eccentric) friends and family, *Edgy* succeeds in making such personal stories a diversion. Maybe it's Star's accessibility, her genuine excitement about new places and people, or her ability to relate her coming-of-age experiences like they've never happened to anyone before but her. What-

ever it is, her writing is clear and lively, and it feels good to read the musings of someone who's so inspired. (AJA)

\$3 or \$2 + 2 stamps, Star Blue, PO Box 746, Occidental, CA 95465, edgyzine@hotmail.com

Exit Strategy #2

Exit Strategy, an art annual curated by the masterminds at Abide Visuals, feels like a cross between high-school yearbook and fever dream. Yearbook because of its organization: 70 sharply designed, commercial-free pages of visual art by creatrices living everywhere from Toledo to Israel. Fever dream because of the visuals themselves, including: political rants, cocaine, birdcages, cheekbones, and cherubim. *Exit Strategy* #1 featured two-page spreads, centerfold-style, so in the name of shaking-things-up, #2 runs each artist's two-pages back to back, which often creates poignant or jarring juxtapositions. The zine comes with stickers and a 10-inch EP featuring jams kicked (some newly) by Sincabeza, PETS, Butch vs. Femme, GOLAB, and the Tangles. I have no idea how Abide Visuals pulled off a glossy, album-sized zine, with goodies and risky art and no advertising, but I'll drink to the doing. The price is a bit steep, but no more so than it would cost to buy works from each individual artist. Supporting a bright, brave undertaking like this is super-important, if you can spare the cash. (MC)

\$25, Abide Visuals Multimedia Juggernaut, www.exitstrategymagazine.com

Fag Punk: Trips Across Canada

If you're looking for a zine dedicated to raunchy one-off sexcapades, look no further. As the name would imply, the pillow talk here is courtesy of a queer punk with a brash writing style that negates any sort of emotional context. This particular issue chronicles his experiences in Fredericton over the course of a few pages, though only a few of those involve his actual stories: the rest are devoted to content disclaimers and random military terminology. The various liaisons detailed here are unmoving, and intentionally so, as they are whittled down to quick scenes in bathroom stalls, downing pills, and somehow ending up naked on a bed. In the end, it is as unfulfilling as our narrator's experiences seemed to be, and airing that sort of dirty laundry without any payoff, save for the physical, seems a little overly masochistic. (SBM)

[No price given], fagpunk@gmail.com

Freezer Burn #7

Freezer Burn, a collage of random ideas turned into comics, is summed up best a few pages from the end, where a nondescript man is holding a copy and explaining that the zine is completely average, says nothing, but it looks okay. Dedicated to starving

About our reviews: We make every attempt to review all the zines (or magazines) we receive, as long as they are released independently. However, despite our best efforts, not every zine ends up in here for a myriad of reasons. The zines to the left on the opening page—the ones with the magazine cover reproduced—are designated as “lead” reviews by the reviewer. That means it’s a zine that really stands out for them this time around. But it certainly doesn’t mean that the many other zines reviewed aren’t good. Finally, if a reviewer doesn’t like your zine, it’s just one person’s opinion, so don’t freak out. We’re sure you put a good deal of work into your project and that alone is worth some congratulations!

This issue’s reviewers: Abbie J. Amadio (AJA), Ari Charney (AC), Vincent Chung (VC), Liz Mason (LM), Sarah Moody (SBM), and Brian Moss (BM) Edited by Laura Pearson

artists, the zine is an empty read, mostly devoid of substance or entertainment value. The author seems fully aware of this and yet shows little motivation to change it. (VC)

\$1, Bens Industries, 4151 Hickory Hill Dr., St. Louis, MO 63129, driegum@aol.com, www.myspace.com/freezerburnzine

Grace Comics Showcase

Grace Comics Showcase is a series of graphic literature performances and readings, as curated by Elizabeth Merrick and Ariel Bordeaux. The New York-based series formed in response to the, uh, profound lack of women included in the *Masters of American Comics* show. So this zine—including a rich selection of people-centric graphics, a transcript of a round-table discussion, essays both drawn and written, and more links than a hot dog stand in summertime—was made to advertise and accompany the series. Bordeaux’s writing rambles comfortably, and is personal, inquisitive, and all-inclusive. (Consequently, she’s not terribly critical, but maybe that’s OK.) There are some great resources, especially a list of 32 “lady cartoonists,” with a blurb for each, and including oft-overlooked types like Renee French and Genevieve Castree. All told, I enjoyed the read, very much, but some of the contents confused me a little. Many of the women say gender is moot, which is cool, but why prolong the ghettoization with a title like “Kick-ass, Rockin’ Women Cartoonists?” We’ve all read Doucet, but did you Faludi? (MC)

\$3, Ariel Bordeaux, ariel@henpartycomics.com

The Inner Swine #12.4

There are many reasons to hate *The Inner Swine*: Jeff Somers’ narcissism, mostly, which is a bigger turn-off than the punch bowl at a junior high dance. But maybe I’m just jealous-er than that *Gin Blossoms* song. After all, Somers has love with his Duchess, a job that keeps him in Xeroxes, a sprawling distribution (*Swine* was one of the few zines you could dependably find at Tower (RIP)), and he reprints every critical review written about him, which is genius on several levels. Dude writes like a madman (or a drunken pirate), so the count is sometimes more impressive than the words themselves. Then again, his essay-style smarm and self-deprecation crack me up at least thrice per piece, and a “Thank You” page chock full of friends is always a good sign. *Swine* #12.4 isn’t necessarily better, or truly different, than previous issues, but it does include a justification of wasted time, “huge, amazing burritos,” and the Insane Wacko Dance. (MC)

\$2, Jeff Somers, POB 3024, Hoboken NJ 07030, mreitor@innerswine.com

Jelly Cake, Vol. 1 #4

I’m having a hard time sustaining interest in any

of the characters of *Jelly Cake*—or what appears to be a fictional account of some kids who play Dance Dance Revolution and watch anime, interrupted by a rant about the evils of requiring a receipt for retail store returns (?), and a short interview with a college freshman who has the world’s largest capsule toy collection. There’s a disclaimer in the front of the zine that states it is fiction (like there’s the possibility of a lawsuit?), and of course a mandate that nothing here can be reproduced without permission, which is of course, ridiculous, because who really gives a shit? I mean, disclaimers and copyright mandates—it’s as if the ideas in this particular zine are so mind-blowingly amazing, entertaining, enlightening, and groundbreaking that they run the risk of being plagiarized by someone else in the publishing community. Get real. (LM)

\$1.50, Jelly Cake Zine, PO Box 581412, Minneapolis, MN 55458-1412, jellycakazine@yahoo.com

Kiss Machine #13: Nature v. Nurture

Kiss Machine is a government-subsidized art/lit magazine. Reading it makes me want to move to Canada, or, at the very least, write a sincere thank-you note to a country that enables its citizens to make a full-color, hi-res, glossy publication featuring butchered pigs, groundhogs with hairy pink teats, and a photo essay of trees entitled “The Day I Watched ‘I Heart Huckabees.’” Unfortunately, there is also some dully-glossed navel-gazing and a few unnecessarily long stories. This issue’s theme is Nature v. Nurture, and some submissions seem to have misread that as How My Parents/Society Screwed Me, Me, Me Up So Very Badly. And I’m wary of any publication that runs a highly complimentary Letter to the Editor and a short story by the same person, in one issue. That said, I’d accept all of those things in a Xerox-‘n-staple outfit, so maybe I’m just bitter about barcodes. (MC)

\$5, Emily Pohl-Weary, PO Box 108, Station P, Toronto, ON M5S 258, Canada, www.kissmachine.org

Let’s Just Pretend #4

Kate seems like a person I’d choose—first—for my kickball team. In *Let’s Just Pretend*, her questions are deft, direct (and just as gruff as any crustpunk’s, which rules), and she never romanticizes or apologizes overmuch. The layout is pretty sweet, and looks almost like what *Cometbus* might have done if he hadn’t had unrestricted access to Kinko’s. Kate’s a planner, so you won’t find any spontaneous questions or fluff, but you will be able to decipher all paragraphs and track down every band. And, of course, linear thinkers can still be (and even often are) delightfully weird, as evidenced by photos of an “ass-licking cat” mixed with the Routine Circle interview. Some of the rants have a few too many tentacles, but isn’t that how the good ones always are? The smor-

gasbord includes: The Cut-Ups, Against Me, rants, “Bad V. Rad,” and music recs. (MC)

£1.50, Kate, 59 Canning Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6QF, UK, letsjustpretenditskate@hotmail.co.uk

Martin Hell #1

Little girls in skeleton costumes getting run over, dream-like epiphanies, a couple of bad jokes, harsh day jobs and pills, some lukewarm poetry, and a whole lot of art school. This half-literary zine, full of anecdotes, ramblings, and so forth compiled by a young British man, features a couple of treasures and a lot of mediocrity. Most of the writing will undoubtedly drive your fingers into page-flipping frenzies, but every now and again you might sputter and stop in short-lived captivation. (BM)

£1, Martin Hell 59 Canning Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6QF, UK, martinhell@hotmail.co.uk

Morgenmuffel #15

In an endearing comic zine from the UK, author/artist Isy creates well-drawn panels that escort the reader through her various summer trips and experiences, be it a journey to the country or a holiday in Latvia. Event follows event without much additional content, causing *Morgenmuffel* to come across as more a visual journal rather than a personal narrative. No matter: the simple penned images carry their own charm. (SBM)

\$3, Free to prisoners, PO Box 74, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 4ZQ, UK

Nobody Can Eat 50 Eggs #26

While it appears that this zine may have originally been comprised largely of satirical content, as is evidenced by many of the features in issue 26, editor Steve Steiner wisely chose to shift to documenting the minutiae of his personal life in the comics diaries that comprise issues 27-28 (reviewed below). Issue 26 has a number of promising parodies, including articles such as “The Secret World of Amish Strip Clubs” and the “Real Death of the Crocodile,” but each of these pieces tends to test the reader’s patience before the halfway point. And even the appealingly goofy Sergio Aragonés-inspired doodles that accompany pieces like “Types of People at Weddings” can’t overcome the fact that the “Awkward Toastgiving Bestman” and the “Bossy Mother-In-Law” have been sufficiently parodied throughout the culture already. (AC)

[No price given], Steve Steiner, eat_50_eggs@hotmail.com

Nobody Can Eat 50 Eggs #27 - 28

In his introduction, editor Steve Steiner notes that since 2002, he’s been chronicling his every day life in comics diaries that now comprise roughly ten volumes totaling nearly 2,000 comics. These two issues are comprised of a small sampling from this larger body of work. It’s hard not to be impressed

by the consistent effort involved in such prolific output, particularly when the editor is unflinching in depicting some of his less flattering attributes. Potential readers should keep in mind that because these are comics diaries that are hastily assembled at the conclusion of each day, they are minimally edited and crudely drawn. But Steiner’s chicken scratches are sufficiently charming even if they occasionally make it difficult to distinguish between the different characters. Steiner is a 25 year-old ad designer at a small town newspaper who persists in his long distance romance with his college girlfriend even as various MySpace flirtations test his fidelity. The narrative works best when focusing on his tedious day job, and even better when he perfectly captures the semi-dysfunction of his long distance romance. Steiner freely acknowledges that not every vignette will be of interest to strangers, but Steiner has succeeded in making many of even the most mundane aspects of his life into compelling reading. (AC)

[No price given], Steve Steiner, eat_50_eggs@hotmail.com

Panic Attack #1

“These stories are for the down and outters, the gonowheres, the broken-hearted, the people who are kept alive by thoughts of suicide. These stories are for the people who can’t cope. These stories are for the people who live through sleepless alcohol-filled nights and broken knuckled fist fights, the people who just can’t deal, these are stories for the lost, the people that are still searching, still trying.” So reads the preface to Matt Coppins’ *Panic Attack*. With such a grandiose introduction, expectations naturally intensify. All in all, the writing ain’t too bad, but really, just because a person likes drinking, infatuations, fucking, and loud music, it doesn’t necessarily make them a beacon of counterculture living. Coppins has a tendency to write with an incredibly self-important tone, making it seem as though he views his life as one of constant revolt. The sad truth of the matter is that authors/narratives primarily focused on reveling in the glorification of excessive consumption of fleshly pleasures are all too commonplace. While the material makes for good porch or barstool conversation, in order to be unique on a literary level, near-genius is required. Maybe I’m just sick of people associating their self-proclaimed “punk” status with downing a 12-pack every night and getting a crush on the train everyday. While some folks might beg to differ, these indulgences and emotions are fairly universal. Instead of long-winded laments on being 26 and attracted to a 17 year-old girl on the bus or detesting old friends trading in basement shows and stoops for bars and garage rock, I wish Coppins had a catalogue of writing based on joining the Peace

ZINES

Corps, organizing a benefit show, or plotting assassinations. (BM)
[No price given], freakodepresso@hotmail.com

The Power Machine

Written by one Hannah Potassium, this zine claims to be "a lengthy discourse on the nature of squatting," but really, it's a lengthy discourse on the history of one squat, formerly known as The Power Machine, located across from the Alternative Tentacles office in Emeryville, CA. For the most part, it is hugely informative in that it offers a window into the world of squatting—the options available, possible roadblocks, etc. While the introductions are nothing less than fascinating, the second half of this zine quickly devolves into Potassium ridding herself of a slew of personal vendettas against her fellow squatters, right down to a laundry list of character flaws of people that she had only previously mentioned in passing. Further, the last few pages are devoted to quoting the LiveJournal entries of another former squatter who now claims to be her "arch-nemesis." It seems that Potassium would have greatly benefited her zine if she had abandoned such backhanded tactics, as *The Power Machine* initially comes across as a well-researched log of her experiences, raising a great deal of important topics within the realm of squatting (especially in regards to the patriarchal nature of traveling). Then suddenly it's overtaken by the outright anger she still harbors towards those people. After that, I just couldn't take it seriously. (SBM)
\$2 or trade, Hannah.Potassium@riseup.net

The Punk Pagan #7 and #8

I would imagine going to prison to be one of those "rock bottom" low points; in fact, just the thought of it makes me soil my pants. So I can imagine how spiritual transformations happen frequently to the weary souls of the incarcerated. In *The Punk Pagan*, 48 year-old Maniac Mike channels two "religious" outlets: punk rock and paganism. An enormous amount of anti-depressants covers the rest. His zines feature a large range of topics, seemingly unusual for someone who has little contact with the outside world. Much of issues #7 and #8 relate to Wiccan teachings—an obvious point of solace for Mike, and his enormous knowledge of the subject makes for an interesting read. The rest of *The Punk Pagan* reads like a personal zine, addressing intense experiences such as being adopted, the death of a father, and child abuse. Other topics are more light-hearted (a great NASCAR piece), and there's also a bit of current events coverage. (VC)
Free, but I'd send a \$1 or 2 for postage, PunkPaganPub@prodigy.net

Rad Dad #4

One of several parenting zines, *Rad Dad* is the prod-

uct of a radical dad. He incorporates the perspective of his kids ("Like, why does everything need to be radical, Tom?") and relates his experiences with raising mixed ethnicity children (himself a product of a biracial parents). There's a really cool list of radical kid reading which I plan to investigate for the expanding children's book section at work. Additionally, the author provides some insightful investigation into parenting issues and interviews parenting writer Matt Hern. (LM)
[No price given], Tom Moniz, 1636 Fairview St., Berkeley, CA 94703, tom_moniz@riseup.net

Razor Burn #50

When first glimpsing this zine's cover, I was all prepared for some lame 'local scene report' about bands I don't care about, etc. But I was so wrong. This is actually more of an overview of the editor's life, with a few pop culture hooks and some filler fiction material. But here's the thing: Aaron Lange is a super awesome comics artist. I don't understand why there aren't like, books of his work published by some hipster small publisher out of Seattle or some shit like that. (Or is there, and I'm just not in the know?) This issue of *Razor Burn* contains a couple of good interviews—one with Bob Burden (Flaming Carrot) and Dean Haglund (no shit—one of the Lone Gunmen from the X-Files, now doing improv comedy in LA! How did that interview come to be, I'd like to know? And it turns out Haglund's favorite band is Minor Threat. Go figure.), RB shines brightest when there are opportunities for comics—e.g. a hilarious mental hygiene spoof about the evils of, uh, chess. Keep the razor burnin'! (LM)
\$2, TheRazorBurnMansion.com

The Sephiroth: The Written Texts of His Most Illuminated Keeper of the Great Secret

It's hard for performance poets to publish their art. On the one hand, the words might be worth preserving, but on the other, sometimes they just don't work off the stage (or street corner, or basement). The Sephiroth, a new collection from performance poet, Knight Templar, and self-described "free spirit" Mark Bruback, takes this risk. It's neatly bound, in red and black, with graphics of ciphers and serpents and ABRACADABRA triangles. Reading it feels like a puzzle, partially because of the jump from spoken word to written, but mostly because Bruback values secrets so much and wants to inspire his readers towards their own learning. If that sort of thing attracts you, well, great—snap this up. Bruback's good at the nebulosity, the fiery rant, the showing a lock and letting you find the key. But you should look elsewhere for direction or a concrete resource. Bruback would say, "Look inside yourself." I say, "OK, but I gotta find a compass first." Either way, see him perform if you can. (MC)
[No price given], Mark Bruback, P.M. 184, 2608 Second Avenue, Seattle WA 98121, markbruback@yahoo.com

The Snailwell Gazette #2

The Snailwell Gazette is comprised of amusing stories written by an American woman living with her family in England. She tells of her off-kilter family members, friends coming to visit (and almost burning her house down), gardening "secrets," and funny incidents revolving around her children and friends' children. It's all very good-natured, though what's amusing to the writer isn't always amusing to the reader. True, some of the content is entertaining regardless of the audience, but the majority of *The Snailwell Gazette* is suited for a reader with similar experiences to share. (AJA)
\$2/£1, Uncle Chris, 174 Delancy St, Apt 7R, New York, NY 10002, www.snailwellgazette.com

State Lines and Time Zones

This split zine project is the outcome of Alex's (*Brainscan and Stolen Sharpie Revolution*) cross-country trip to Illinois to meet Alan (*Pressed Between the Pages*). Obvious masters of the cut + paste, this duo's design aesthetic is solid, even if it isn't the most innovative. With spreads separated into quadrants, each panel features a separate narrative intended to represent a different season. These panels are short and savory and have the effect of an Adrian Tomine comic. *State Lines and Time Zones* contains snippets of human interaction but offers little exposition; consequently, readers never witness the climax. Like a series of denouements, the tension focuses on a lingering want that never seems satiated. Long goodbyes with this pair must be excruciating. (VC)
\$2 or comparable trade to Alex Wrek, 809 M Shaver St., Portland, OR 97227 or Alan Lastufka, PO Box 254, Manhattan, IL 60442, www.fallofautumn.com

Street Art Workers: Land and Globalization

This collection of 25 posters from 10 countries focuses on the Street Art Workers' 2006 campaign: Land and Globalization. Intended for separation and display in the most culture-jamming method possible, this zine is laid out like a very large newspaper and takes about 30 seconds to read. Some posters capture innovative visual ideas, while others are more straightforward and information-oriented. All are successful at addressing globalization issues in a concise visual manner. (VC)
\$6, www.justseeds.org, Bulk orders: www.streetartworkers.org, streetartworkers@gmail.com

Three Records

Photographer Chrissy Piper's zine combines portraits with brief interviews in regards to her subjects' (most of whom are band members or long-standing scene contributors) three favorite, or most influential, records. It's a timeless question, and given the notability and thoughtfulness of some her friends and peers, the responses are quite intriguing. Furthermore, Chrissy's talents as a photographer are impressive; her knack for visually capturing genuine personality is remarkable. Highly recommended cof-

fee table material. (BM)

[No price given] www.chrissypiper.com, seepiper@hotmail.com

Words and Pictures #1

This zine's incredibly detailed renderings (there are nearly 30 full-page drawings in this issue) come across as a bizarre hybrid of surrealism and satiric political cartooning. Though the editor's modest introduction describes his drawings as a "tool for self-exploration," it's clear from all the painstaking stippling and cross-hatching that he has ambitions beyond mere self-reflection. Some of the more common themes that emerge are the dehumanizing aspects of modern life and disgust with pop culture and the mass media. Unfortunately, the "Words" component of this zine tends to be rambling and, at times, pedantic, as a detailed passage explaining the artistic process and the various symbols in the imagery runs alongside each piece. Still, an impressive amount of effort went into this zine, and anyone who enjoys anarcho-leftist political critiques of society will delight in the editor's intense visual polemics. (AC)
\$2 ppd or trade, PO Box 2454, Amherst, MA 01004, Andy_939@hotmail.com

Yellow Cardigan #1

I gave up on music zines years ago. The concept of asking someone mundane, uninspiring questions just because they play in a rock band never got me going. However, *Yellow Cardigan* is a true model of what other music zines should aspire to, both in content and quality of journalism. I found myself reading interesting features about bands I had never heard of. The highlight here is an interview with Dr. Frank about his novel writing and songwriting approaches and where they meet, among other things. The Steinways talking about the relationships in their band is pretty fascinating too, even if the interview is a bit too personal at times. (JB)
\$2, *Yellow Cardigan*, 170 Claremont Ave #20, New York, NY 10027

Zinetopia #0

Offered as the prequel issue to the proper zine itself, *Zinetopia* is proudly a review zine, and I find it strange to be writing a review of a review zine. It is small, simple and straightforward, with intentionally scattered text and a short interview with Sweet Pea zine distro in addition to the reviews section. While there is a bevy of zines reviewed in this issue, it is difficult to obtain a clear idea of every zine reviewed, as each runs the length of approximately three sentences. Basically, it's like taking the zine section out of any magazine and photocopying it, as there isn't much else in terms of content. But again, as a prequel, this is more a call for submissions than anything else, so for those of you in need of review outlets, send a copy to the address below and help Sarah get things rolling. (SBM)
\$1 ppd or trade, Sarah R., PO Box 816, North Tazewell, VA 24630, piratesarah@gmail.com



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Punk-rocker Zack Fury thought killing himself would make things easier. Imagine his surprise when he's plopped in the middle of Holcyon, a realm located deep inside a black hole on the edge of the Milky Way galaxy. Holcyon seems somewhat like Earth—except here it's always dusk, time doesn't pass, and you're never hungry, thirsty or tired.

Soon, Zack meets up with Dr. Prescott Rosenthal, an ophthalmologist from Maine, and Melody Holiday, an indie-pop singer from Australia. But before they can figure Holcyon out, here comes: a man on a flying, horse-sized tarantula; a skeletal ghost riding a zombie horse; trees with blood-thirsty Venus flytraps for branches; Anubis, the Egyptian god of the dead; and Medusa, who has green skin and snakes for hair, but a fish trunk like a mermaid.

Quicker than you can say *Necronomicon*, Zack discovers Holcyon is the locale where the ultimate battle between good and evil will take place, with the fighting culminating at the . . . *Afterlife Battlefield*!

Afterlife Battlefield by Johnny Ostentatious available at:

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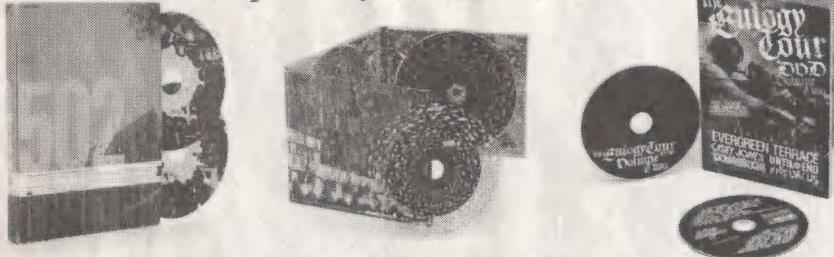
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ART AGAINST AUTHORITY

Edited by Josh MacPhee & Erik Reuland

A sprawling and inclusive collection bursting with ideas and images, *Realizing the Impossible* is tour of turn-of-the-century French cartoonists to modern-day Indonesian printmaking, massive squatted urban villages in Denmark to stencil artists in Argentina—as well as conversations with pioneering anarchist artists like Clifford Harper, Carlos Cortéz, Gee Vaucher, and members of Black Mask. A richly illustrated history and survey of art and anarchism.



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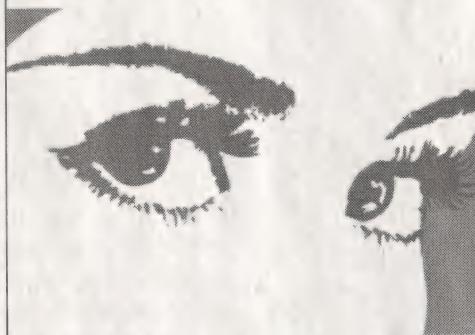
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YEAR OF NO LIGHT

NORD



As part of our current plundering of the French art metal underground, Crucial Blast presents a domestic release of *Nord*, a crushing melodic metallic monster. Heavy and raw yet amazingly beautiful, *YEAR OF NO LIGHT* seem to orbit the guitar-heavy early 90's alt rock of bands like SWERVEDRIVER and DINOSAUR JR. THE CURE and MY BLOODY VALENTINE just as much as they draw from the metallic post-hardcore zeitgeist pioneered by ISIS and NEUROSIS. The album flows snarlersly between passages of ultra epic rock and bursts of dissonant, crushing hardcore, through austere and radiant guitar figures and gorgeous ambient drones, massive doomy dirge metal, utterly gorgeous Loveless inspired melodic bliss, and some almost folky, but unbelievably EPIC riffs, with powerful stripped vocals fighting through the band's wall of sound. Crucial Blast's release of *Nord* will be presented in an eye-grabbing 4-panel CD case, printed by Stumptown Printers.

MONARCH!

DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES

Dead Men Tell No Tales is a colossal collection of not one, but two full length albums from the glacial French sludge/feedback/lava rock behemoth known as MONARCH. MONARCH unleash a slow motion avalanche of blackened sludge and hypnotic feedback, each song a series of epic tarpit riffs stretched out eternally over lumbering drums and the cavernous rumble of speaker cabinets. Over these yawning expanses of black void appears the demonic, throat-shredding shrieks and ghostly singing of Emilie whose petite appearance belies one of the harshest throats in the underground Doom spectrum. Beyond heavy, MONARCH's mega-crawling ambient doom/drone sludge follows in the grand tradition of fellow tarpit adventurers M-Minus, Corrupted, Noothgrush, and Black Sabbath. This double CD set will contain both MONARCH's newest album *Die Tonight* and the *Speak Of The Sea* LP, with additional unreleased material exclusive to this release. Presented in an offset printed 4-panel case printed by Stumptown Printers.



BLACK ELK

CONTAGION HEURISTIC

The eponymous debut from Portland, Oregon's BLACK ELK is a frothing-at-the-mouth eruption of damaged yet majestic destruction. A creeped out conglom of carnivorous charred hardcore punk, the sludgy power of primo Pacific Northwest tarpit trawf, twitchy Midwestern noise rage, somewhere between Am Rep circa-1991 and a more freaked out DIE KREUZEN, all swimming together into a goathedded, psychedelic, rock/wood block/mass/dance party that has risen to a fever pitch. Produced by Mike Lastra at 5megma Studios (EARTH, THRONES, JACKIE O, MOTHER FUCKER).

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GENERATION LOSS

ELIZABETH HAND

"Crackles with energy: it is alive." —Nicholas Rombes (*The Ramones and New Punk Cinema*)

★ "Explores the narrow boundary between artistic genius and madness in this gritty, profoundly unsettling literary thriller." —*Publishers Weekly*

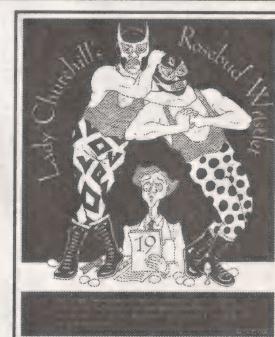
"Intense and atmospheric, *Generation Loss* is an inventive brew of postpunk attitude and dark mystery." —George Pelecanos

Cass Neary made her name as a photographer in the '70s in the NYC punk scene. Her pictures of musicians and hangers on, the infamous, the damned, and the dead, got her into art galleries and a book deal. 30 years later she's adrift, down, and almost out. Then a scuzzy old acquaintance gets her a mercy gig to interview a reclusive photographer in Maine. When she arrives Downeast, Cass gets caught up in a decades-old mystery that's still claiming victims, and into one final shot at redemption.

"Lucid and beautifully rendered. An excellent book." —Brian Evenson (*The Open Curtain*)

Hello *Punk Planet* readers, this is Small Beer Press writing to you from our snowed-in office in Northampton, Mass. We publish 4-6 books a year, most of them weird, brilliant short story collections or novels. We started by doing a zine (see LCRW to the right) in another century (1996) and since 2001 we've published books by Kelly Link (read her first book free on our website, lerw.net), Carol Emshwiller, Sean Stewart (not the *Thoughtworm* Sean!), Argentinean writer Angélica Gorodischer, Howard Waldrop, Jennifer Stevenson, and others, as well as an affordable (i.e. cheap) series of chapbooks of new writers.

Besides Liz Hand's *Generation Loss*, we are publishing three other books this year: John Crowley's beautifully written *Endless Things*, the fourth and final novel in his *Egypt* sequence. Michael Chabon says: "There are some people—and I'm one of them—for whom life consists only in passing time between novels by John Crowley." The second book is *Interfictions: An Anthology of Interstitial Writing* edited by Delia Sherman & Theodora Goss (the literary mode for the new century). And lastly but not leastly, there's Laurie J. Marks's *Water Logic*—Marks has written three books so far in her award-winning, kick-ass fantasy series that continues to be political, timely, feminist, and unputdownable. See you next time.



If you like your zines small, regular, and filled with weird fiction (and occasionally other things) *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet* may be for you. ("A feast of mystery, novelty, and desire." —*Zine World* 23) We've been celebrating 10 Years of Textual Fun (there's a spiffy *Best of* anthology due from Del Rey in autumn). Latest issue, #19, comes with an advice column, fiction by Carol Emshwiller, Ray Vukcevich—and a passel of new writers—and is our first issue to feature wrestlers on the cover. 56 pages, \$5 inc. postage.

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GOING DOWN in the underground

An overview of what's happening where, when, and how in the coming months

Need proof that the Europeans do everything better? **All Tomorrow's Parties**, May 18-20, features: Modest Mouse, Shellac, The Books, Patti Smith, Band of Horses, Do Make Say Think, Built to Spill, and Grizzly Bear.

Fat Cat's **Animal Collective** leave their paw tracks all over the nation in May.

In support of their new full length, *Cassadaga*, **Bright Eyes** kicks off a full US tour on April 22 in Milwaukee at the Pabst Theatre. The tour closes with seven dates in a row at New York's Town Hall May 25 through June 1.

John "Bloodclot" Joseph of **Cro Mags** fame, wrote the book *The Evolution of a Cro-Magnon*, which has existed in audio format for several months. The print version was originally slated to be released last fall, but you can finally pick up a copy of the book in stores.

Starting May 21, Slint will reunite for a handful of European dates in conjunction with All Tomorrow Parties' "**Don't Look Back**" series. The idea behind "Don't Look Back" is to give artists the

chance to perform live their recordings that made significant waves in music—which, when you think about it, is an odd name for something so backward-focused. So for eight shows, Slint will play 1991's *Spiderland*. Other "Don't Look Back" performances include Sonic Youth playing *Daydream Nation* and London's The House of Love playing their self-titled debut.

Explosions in the Sky continue their insane touring schedule, playing shows around the US until late May before heading over for a tour of the UK and Europe, commencing with an All Tomorrow's Parties appearance in Somerset, England.

Starting in mid-May, folk/punkers **Ghost Mice** will set out on a European tour, beginning and ending in Ireland.

Forthcoming from Thrill Jockey is a curious 48-page art book and full-length album by **Daniel AIU Higgs**—yes, despite the odd letters mid-name, that's bearded Lungfish frontman Dan Higgs—both titled *Atomic Yggdrasil Tarot*. The label will conjure this book/album release on June 5.

After two months of US touring, the **Mad Caddies** keep it going across the Atlantic, playing shows in Europe, the UK, and South Africa in support of their fifth full length—*Keep it Going*—on Fat Wreck Chords. The CD/LP hits stores May 1.

Post-rock/electronic act **Mice Parade** (AKA Adam Pierce) embarks on a US in late May.

NOFX are making a documentary about a tour through Taiwan, Russia, Israel, and South Africa. As lead singer/Fat Wreck Chords head-honcho Fat Mike explains, a film crew will document "all the weird places we're going to."

Joanna Newsom's full-band EP, the unfortunately named *Joanna Newsom and the Ys Street Band* will hit stores on April 24, courtesy Drag City.

The jittery Chicago popsters in **the Narrator** put down the flat Jolt cola they've been hoarding since the '80s to release their latest album *All That To The Wall* on Flame-shovel Records May 15.

After an almost four-year hiatus, the **Sea and Cake** will kick off the month of May with a new album,

Everybody, on Thrill Jockey. The original lineup remains intact: Sam Prekop, Archer Prewitt, Eric Clapidge, and John McEntire.

On May 22, Canadian quartet **Shapes and Sizes** unveil their sophomore LP, *Split Lips, Winnings Hips, A Shiner*, on Asthmatic Kitty.

On May 8 Kill Rock Stars will release *New Moon*, a double album of unreleased and rare material by the late **Elliott Smith**. The album will contain tracks from 1995-1997 during the self-titled and *Either/Or* era.

Fat Wreck's **Strung Out** release their new album, *Blackhawks Over Los Angeles* on June 12.

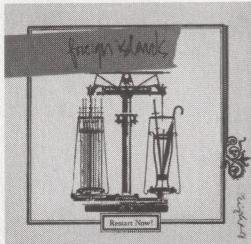
Thrill Jockey's **Tortoise** will embark on a short US tour, beginning in June. Along the way, they'll share the stage with Hot Chip, Kieran Hebden, and Steve Reid.

Former Crowsdell frontwoman **Shannon Wright** releases her sixth solo album on Touch & Go/Quarterstick Records on May 8. *Let In The Light* features the Shipping News' drummer Kyle Crabtree on skins.

Got something going down? Drop us a line at goingdown@punkplanet.com



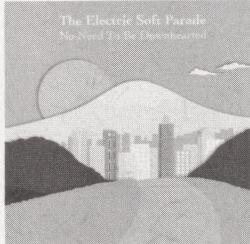
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FOREIGN ISLANDS
Restart Now!

Foreign Islands have quickly earned a reputation as one of NYC's best live acts, serving up tight, energetic sets with added percussion, buzzes, and electronic beeps.

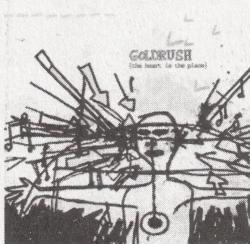
DEAF DUMB + BLIND



THE ELECTRIC SOFT PARADE
No Need To Be Downhearted

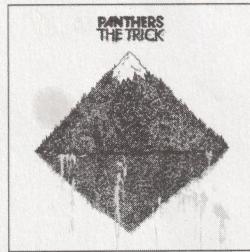
Space-age power-balladeers newest release is a universe of sound, all underpinned by endless harmonies and a feeling that their records somehow come from the future.

BETTER LOOKING



GOLDRUSH
The Heart Is The Place

Goldrush return with an album that sounds like The Flaming Lips playing Wilco's 'Yankee Hotel Foxtrot'. - NME



PANTHERS
The Trick

Heavy, fast, concise and super-melodic, Panthers' power rock comes on like a pop Queens of the Stone Age with three-minute blasts of anthemic glory.

VICE



MARNIE STERN
In Advance Of The Broken Arm

Marnie's songs contain a staggering number of layers, each one winding its way around the others, then counterpointed by her feminine, echoing, powerful vocals.

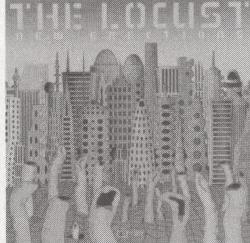
KILL ROCK STARS



THE PONYS
Turn The Lights Out

Chicago's The Ponys are a classic twin-guitar rock band fronted by impassioned vocals, with songwriting ranging from psych jams to pounding rockers to twisted singer-songwriter material.

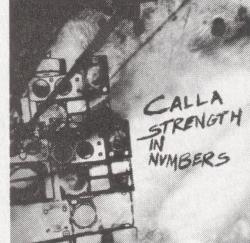
MATADOR



THE LOCUST
New Erections

The Locust are fast, atrociously ultra violent, and drenched in sci-fi noise, gruesome keyboards, and herky jerky, bestial scream/sing vocals, described by one journalist as "a car wreck with vocals."

ANTI-



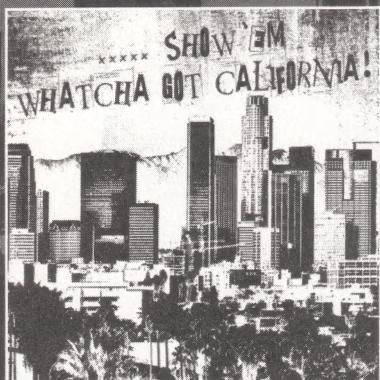
CALLA
Strength In Numbers

Calla's third effort encompasses their signature experimental raw sound. They've created their own identity, while at the same time have been compared to Nick Cave and Low.

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This compilation was definitely not put together overnight. Durty Mick Records searched high and low to compile this, from San Francisco to San Diego and surely not forgetting Los Angeles, 24 bands showing the world what they got! For anyone interested in punk just the tiniest bit, this hard-hitting compilation will change the way they think about music. With bands such as STRONGARM AND THE BULLIES, THE SORE THUMBS, MISLED CITIZEN and Dekoiz.

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Prepare. Put on your mask. Put on your gloves. This is jihad, built from the ground up by members of BACKSTABBERS INC and DECEMBER WOLVES to set fire to burning resentments. These are not desperate youth with clichés to spit and nowhere to turn; these are men who have lived for their art. This is blistering, grind-infused punk and metal for worshippers of ENTOMBED, TRAGEDY, ROTTEN SOUND, NASUM and DISCHARGE. This is TRAP THEM, and they are prepared to break down your front door and put their art right in your face.

trash art!
sound and culture



GREEN LIZARD
Las Armas Del Silencio

ISCR838: CD

Out Now! on I Scream Records
GREEN LIZARD have become loud rock favorites in Europe, and with the release of *Las Armas Del Silencio* the boys will reach new ears, playing a style of heavy groove oriented rock that will grab the attention of those who enjoy QUICKSAND, PAPA ROACH or even poppier acts like THURSDAY.

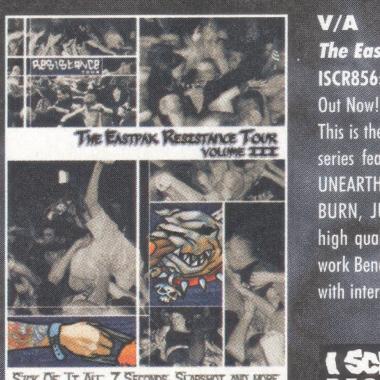
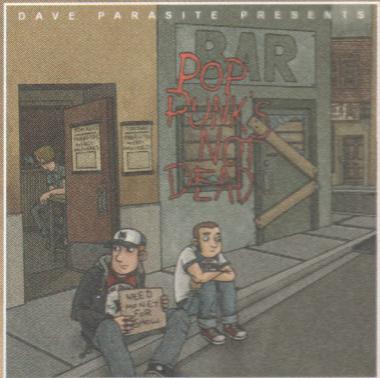
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V/A
Pop Punk's Not Dead

GK127: CD

Out Now! on Go-kart Records
Pop Punk's Not Dead is the greatest compilation ever. Well, that is if you're a fan of incredibly catchy pop punk from all over the world. Featuring songs from some of the biggest names in the genre (THE QUEERS, SQUIRTGUN, THE PARASITES), as well as some of the hottest up and comers (THE ERGS!, THE UNLOVABLES). This comp features bands from all over the world including the US, Germany, Japan, Australia, UK, Italy and of course, the Cayman Islands. Includes many unreleased or hard to find tracks. This is a MUST own for everyone who likes pop punk.

go kart records

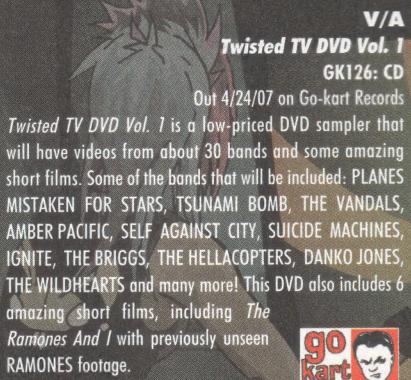


V/A
The Eastpak Resistance Tour Volume III

ISCR856: DVD

Out Now! on I Scream Records
This is the third volume in *The Eastpak Resistance Tour* series featuring SICK OF IT ALL, 7 SECONDS, SLAPSHOT, UNEARTH, WALLS OF JERICHO, THE BONES, HEAVEN SHALL BURN, JUDASVILLE, and NO TURNING BACK. It has a high quality, 5 camera recording captured by the MTV network Benelux. Contains over 140 minutes of exclusive footage with interactive menus, track selection and bonus features.

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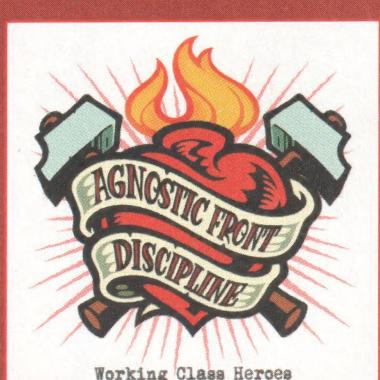
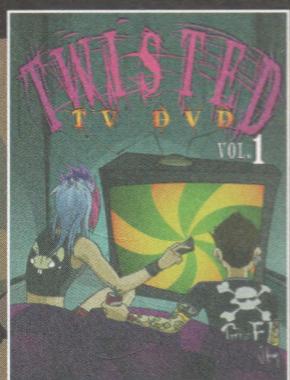


V/A
Twisted TV DVD Vol. 1

GK126: CD

Out 4/24/07 on Go-kart Records
Twisted TV DVD Vol. 1 is a low-priced DVD sampler that will have videos from about 30 bands and some amazing short films. Some of the bands that will be included: PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS, TSUNAMI BOMB, THE VANDALS, AMBER PACIFIC, SELF AGAINST CITY, SUICIDE MACHINES, IGNITE, THE BRIGGS, THE HELLOCOPTERS, DANKO JONES, THE WILDHEARTS and many more! This DVD also includes 6 amazing short films, including *The Ramones And I* with previously unseen RAMONES footage.

go kart records



AGNOSTIC FRONT/DISCIPLINE
Working Class Heroes

ISCR909: CD Out Now! on I Scream Records

It was about time these two amazing bands got together on one CD. The show was recorded at the famous Belgian club Lintfabriek and all tracks are produced by Roger Miret. Wrapped in a killer design, this is a classic! And that's an understatement.

DMIR01: 2xLP Out Now! on Durty Mick Records

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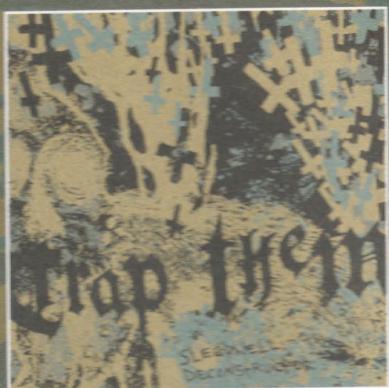
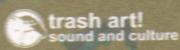
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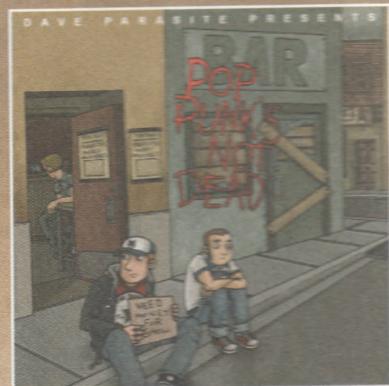
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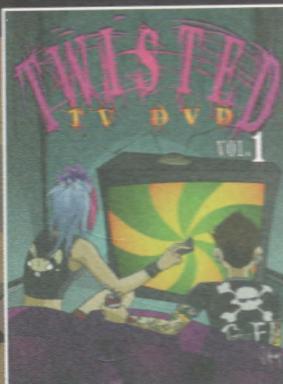
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